

Political Rights Defense Fund

P.O. Box 761, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10007

December 19, 2002

To Supporters of the Fight to Stop the Exclusion Proceedings Against Róger Calero:

Dear Friends,

The fight to stop the exclusion of *Perspectiva Mundial* editor and *Militant* staff writer Róger Calero has been joined by a broad array of defenders of freedom of the press, immigrants' rights, the rights of trade unionists, and defenders of civil liberties.

In the two weeks since Calero was stopped at the Houston Intercontinental Airport, dragged off to detention, and exclusion proceedings against him initiated, a significant campaign has been launched on his behalf. In the charges presented to Calero, the INS says he cannot be admitted into the U.S. because he was convicted in 1988 of selling an ounce of marijuana to an undercover cop when he was in high school. They say they can do this even though the INS waived this conviction in 1990 when they granted Calero permanent residence, and renewed his green card in 2000.

News about his fight has been widely circulated from *El Día*, the Spanish-language daily in Houston; to *Free Speech Radio News* carried across the country on the Pacifica radio network; to the bulletins of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, the Coalition for the Human Rights of Immigrants, the National Network on Cuba, and many others.

Letters to Houston INS District Director Hipolito Acosta demanding the deportation drive be stopped have been sent by Bruce D. Nestor, president of the National Lawyers Guild; Marleine Bastien, executive director of the Haitian Women of Miami; Bill Pearson, president of United Food and Commercial Workers Union local 789, which covers the Dakota Premium Foods plant where Calero worked and helped lead the ground-breaking union organizing drive; Jeremy Dear, general secretary of the National Union of Journalists of Britain; and many more.

Calero paroled out of jail, immigration hearing canceled to be rescheduled later

The rapidity and breadth of the outcry made the INS officials who seized Calero on December 3 step back and take stock of what they had on their hands. They made a calculated decision to let Calero out, paroled into the country, to gain time to quiet the opposition to their move to exclude him and deport him to Nicaragua.

The INS grabbed Calero, like they have grabbed tens of thousands of others, because they have been working overtime to dump local court records into their computers. More and more permanent residents who, like Calero, leave the country for

work, travel, or family reasons, find themselves arrested, as old convictions pop up on the screen when they return to the U.S.

With Calero's release, the exclusion hearing originally scheduled for inside the Houston Processing Center jail on December 17 was postponed. It will be rescheduled before an Immigration Judge in the INS center in Houston.

The INS presented Calero with a set of conditions to meet while on parole. Among these conditions is the requirement that he "obey all Federal, State and local laws." This means that the INS can take action on any minor infraction like jaywalking or trespassing and he can be expelled from the country.

We are locked in a toe-to-toe battle with the government over Calero's right to live and work in this country, and over rights important to all, native-born and immigrant alike. There is no reason to believe they knew who Calero was when they arrested him, but they know now that they are in a fight.

Step up the fight to stop the exclusion proceedings against Róger Calero

The campaign in defense of Calero expanded quickly because a broad range of people understood the importance of the rights involved and because they saw an opening to participate in an effective public fight.

Many reporters are frustrated with growing restrictions on the rights of the press as the government drives to war in the Middle East. Immigrants are being targeted for increasingly frequent attack. Unionists' right to organize and workers' wages and health and safety conditions are being attacked as the economy worsens. Political rights face government assault. People coming from many different perspectives see in Calero's battle an opportunity to defend their own space to work and to fight.

We must respond to the INS move to slow down and defuse the defense campaign with a stepped up effort to strengthen our efforts to press forward.

- * Send messages to INS District Director Hipolito Acosta demanding that the exclusion moves against Calero be dropped. Messages can be faxed to 281-774-5989; or mailed to him at the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 126 Northpoint Drive, Houston, TX 77060. Copies should be sent to the Political Rights Defense Fund, Box 761, Church St. Station, New York, NY 10007.
- * Sign and distribute petitions demanding the INS drop the exclusion of Róger Calero.
- * Funds are urgently needed to meet rapidly mounting legal and other expenses. Defense campaign backers in every city need to raise thousands of dollars for the Political Rights Defense Fund to launch the Róger Calero Defense Committee. Organize phone calling for donations, seek honoraria for speaking engagements, and take collections at political meetings, demonstrations and union meetings. Our goal is to raise over \$50,000 by the end of January.

Tour of Róger Calero announced

The editor of the *Militant* and *Perspectiva Mundial* has released Calero from assignments to allow him to tour the country, speaking on the fight to stop his deportation. He can address broadly sponsored defense meetings, along with other supporters of his fight; he can meet with groups of workers, immigrants rights fighters, reporters, and others to spread the word about the fight, get media coverage and raise funds.

The first stops on the tour will include the Twin Cities in Minnesota, where he was involved in the union organizing drive at Dakota Premium Foods, and other Midwest centers where packinghouse workers are centered, like Des Moines, Chicago and Omaha, Nebraska; Houston, where he was arrested by the INS and organizing efforts were first mobilized to get him out; and Los Angeles, where his family lives and where he went to school.

Requests for tour dates can be made now as the schedule is being prepared.

Defense material available

Up-to-date materials are available on-line at the website of Calero's paper, the *Militant*. The location is www.themilitant.com. Posted there are a fact sheet on the case, a petition, and a sample packet of letters sent to the INS demanding the exclusion proceedings be dropped.

Build the Róger Calero Defense Committee

PRDF is working with other supporters of Calero's rights to launch the Róger Calero Defense Committee. We are soliciting sponsors for this defense committee. There is space on the defense fact sheet for people to sign on. It reads, "I support the fight to stop the exclusion proceedings against Róger Calero. List me as an endorser of the Róger Calero Defense Committee." The breadth of the sponsors' list will show the nonpartisan character of the support for the campaign to stop the deportation of Róger Calero.

The INS has thrown down the gauntlet. We are responding. We can deal some blows to the government's attack on Calero and on all of us that will help a new generation of defenders of political rights to work together and become stronger.

Join us.

In solidarity

sl John Studer

John Studer

Executive Director

Political Rights Defense Fund