

Despite international protests

Second immigrant executed in US

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23 April 1998

For the second time in two weeks an American state rejected international protests and carried out the execution of an immigrant prisoner. Jose Roberto Villafuerte, 45, a citizen of Honduras, was put to death in Arizona April 22.

The execution came despite protests from Honduras and the Vatican and an admission by the US State Department that the prisoner's rights had been violated. Like the Paraguayan immigrant executed a week before in Virginia, Villafuerte was never notified of his right to consult with a consular representative of his native country. He was arrested, tried and convicted in the 1983 killing of a woman companion.

Arizona officials conceded that they had violated Villafuerte's rights under the Vienna Convention, which guarantees similar rights to American citizens travelling abroad. The state clemency board rejected a last-minute appeal from Villafuerte. Mario Fortin, Honduras' ambassador to the United States, testified at the clemency hearing. Afterwards the ambassador said, "An American who is in Honduras or another country, we have to respect his rights. And here in America, they are not respecting his rights."

Besides the legal issues, there was considerable doubt about whether Villafuerte was guilty of first-degree murder, since there was no evidence either of premeditation or even of intent to kill.

Villafuerte had bound and gagged the victim, a female acquaintance, after a drunken quarrel, and then passed out nearby. When police aroused him from sleep, he expressed concern for the woman and led them to her. She had died of suffocation.

Earlier the same day, the state of Missouri executed a man by lethal injection who went to his death protesting his innocence. Glennon Paul Sweet, 42, was convicted of shooting a state trooper. Prosecutors

claimed he had been pulled over for speeding on a remote rural road while transporting illegal narcotics. There were no eyewitnesses to the killing.

Sweet consistently denied any involvement in the crime, claiming that he had merely been driving in the area where the killing took place. In his final statement before going to his death, he declared, "I didn't shoot the trooper. This isn't justice, but I forgive everyone."

The state of Texas carried out another execution in violation of international law late Wednesday night, imposing the death sentence against Joseph Cannon, who was 17 at the time that he killed a Houston lawyer in 1977.

International agreements prohibit the execution of prisoners whose crimes were committed when they were under age 18, but the United States is one of a handful of countries which refused to abide by this world standard. Ten prisoners have now been executed in the US since 1976 for crimes committed when they were 16 or 17. (Cannon was the tenth, and the fifth in Texas).

Meanwhile an Arkansas judge adjourned a court hearing to decide whether a prison inmate should be executed or face a lifetime of paranoid schizophrenia. Charles Singleton is delusional without large doses of anti-psychotic drugs, but he is seeking permission to end his treatment in order to avoid death by lethal injection for the 1979 murder of a grocer.

Circuit Court Judge Fred Davis said he would issue a ruling May 22 on whether Singleton should be executed while taking the drugs or whether he should be permitted to stop the treatment and remain alive but insane. The judge said he would not address the issue of whether Singleton had been insane at the time of the killing.

Execution of the insane is also a violation of

international covenants signed by the US government.



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