

Australia Dossier by Bruce Jacobs

U.N. pushes sodomy in Tasmania

The Australian government has endorsed a U.N. ultimatum to force Tasmania to overturn its anti-sodomy law.

In April of this year, the United Nations Human Rights Committee handed down an ultimatum to the Australian federal government, decreeing that the state of Tasmania's anti-sodomy law must be overturned. The U.N. demanded that Australia reply within 90 days. On July 7, just before the deadline, acting Attorney General Duncan Kerr announced that, despite the extensive opposition within Tasmania to such a repeal, the federal government would override the state law. Said Kerr, "The Tasmanian government seems prepared to live with national and international condemnation of its laws. By the end of the year we intend to take steps to override the laws."

Although it was unclear whether refusal to abide by the ultimatum would result in an embargo of Australia, a Blue Helmet invasion, or perhaps a nuclear strike, what is crystal clear is that the U.N. diktat is part of the drumbeat to "redefine the family," a key theme of the U.N. International Conference on Population and Development, scheduled for Cairo in September, and precisely the agenda of those shouting for "homosexual rights" in Tasmania.

Egging the government on to capitulate to the United Nations (as has been the Labor government's wont in any case on almost every issue), was the usual line-up, beginning with the U.N.'s own local front group, the United Nations Association of Australia, whose vice president, Michael Gorton, said with some alarm on July 5 in Melbourne, just seven days before the deadline: "If Australia is not

going to take any action at all, it then has the problem that it is in breach of its obligations to the United Nations. That means Australia is a recalcitrant in the international human rights systems and it makes it very difficult for Australia to then criticize other countries for breach of human rights."

The British intelligence front Amnesty International, in its annual report issued in early July, announced that it would also "pursue" the federal government to overturn Tasmania's anti-sodomy law, while the leader of the (ostensibly conservative) opposition, Alexander Downer, supported the U.N. demand, announcing that his Liberal Party is "pretty relaxed about people's sexual preferences." The aristocratic Mr. Downer, who was educated in British public schools, had, just a few weeks earlier, achieved some prominence when, asked by an interviewer what he liked to wear; he replied, "a plastic bag and stockings," referring to the practice of autoerotic asphyxiation popular among some of his British parliamentary colleagues.

Meanwhile a prominent academic, Prof. Rebecca Bailey-Harris of Flinders University in South Australia, tied the U.N. Human Rights Committee's decision to the anti-family push. According to the July 1 *Adelaide Advertiser*, Bailey-Harris said the decision "had far-reaching implications for the rights of homosexual couples, including the right to found a family." Bailey-Harris called for homosexual couples to be allowed to be parents, through either "assisted reproduction, fostering, or adoption." Speaking at the 125th anniversary cel-

ebration of Adelaide's St. Peter's Cathedral, Bailey-Harris said, "Society needs to embrace a wider concept of the family and grapple with its functions." She argued that "Australia is no longer wholly dominated by Anglo-Saxon culture and its family values."

Bailey-Harris's tirade was flanked by statements by the leader of the Australian Democrats, Sen. Cheryl Kernot, who announced on July 6 that she intended to make an unprecedented intervention for the "family rights" of homosexuals before the federal Industrial Relations Commission (IRC). Kernot said, "The IRC should consider defining the family to encompass primary caring relationships. . . . I will be arguing that some employees have caring responsibilities which extend to people outside the conventional legal definition of the immediate family."

On the heels of these announcements came the widely publicized news that a lesbian in Sydney had just given birth to triplets, after she and her lesbian partner convinced a male friend to donate his services in order that they could raise a family.

The Tasmania decision is just one of the Australian government's attacks on the family. A scandal broke out earlier this year when the government-run Australian Broadcasting Corp. decided to video the annual "Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras" in Sydney, and telecast it at 8:30 p.m. Sunday evening during prime-time family viewing hours, despite the fact that several dozen Members of Parliament signed a petition in protest. The theme of this year's Mardi Gras, attended by tens of thousands of homosexuals, including 3,000 visiting Australia for the event (of whom a number are HIV-positive), was that homosexual couples were equal to, if not better than, traditional families.