

Council Meeting of the Socialist International
Brussels, 7-8 December 1995

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

I

I am pleased to report to this first SI Council meeting to be hosted in Brussels by the Group of the Party of European Socialists in the European Parliament. I want to thank our Vice-President, Pauline Green, Leader of the PES Group, and all concerned in the organisation of the Council. It is a source of pride and encouragement for all of us to be here at the invitation of our European parliamentary comrades - the largest group in the European Parliament, which also has a socialist President, Klaus Hänsch. The theme of our meeting here in Brussels, "The New Europe in an Interdependent World," reflects an international perspective which informs all the work of the Socialist International, of the PES Parliamentary Group and of socialists worldwide.

II

During the period since our last Council meeting in Cape Town in July, the International has carried out some particularly significant meetings and activities.

The resolution on nuclear testing in the South Pacific adopted by the Council in Cape Town reflected the grave concern of all in our International about this issue, particularly in the light of the decision of the French government to resume testing. This concern continued to grow, as the date of the proposed tests approached, and was expressed in many international fora by social democrats throughout the world, not least those from the Asia-Pacific region. An extraordinary meeting of the SI Asia-Pacific Committee was accordingly convened in Sydney, Australia, on 1-2 September. It was chaired by SI Vice-President Makoto Tanabe, of the Social Democratic Party of Japan, and hosted by the Australian Labor Party. Labor Foreign Minister Gareth Evans and Environment Minister John Faulkner took part, as did the former Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, and many members of the ALP leadership. Leading representatives of almost all our parties in the region attended, together with a number from European parties.

Our President, Pierre Mauroy, in a statement in August, had condemned President Chirac's decision to resume French tests at Mururoa Atoll as "against the spirit of the time" and in no way justified by security imperatives. The SI Committee heard reports of global opposition and protests at the tests and a resolution was adopted which called on France, China and other nuclear-weapon states to desist from any further nuclear tests, to honour the decision to extend indefinitely the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and to fully participate in the pre-negotiations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Unfortunately, the tests at Mururoa Atoll subsequently went ahead, and are continuing. Worldwide opposition also continues, however.

The members of our Asia-Pacific Committee also took the opportunity of the Sydney meeting to review the situation in a number of countries of the region. A resolution was adopted reaffirming support for the Burmese democracy movement. A further resolution deplored the continuing violation of human and political rights in East Timor and called on the Indonesian government to take a number of measures regarding the territory. The Committee also reaffirmed the resolution of our Council in Cape Town which called for a ban on the manufacture and sale of land mines - an issue particularly affecting some countries of the region.

Another significant meeting was that of the SI Committee for Central and Eastern Europe, held in Moscow on 3-4 November. The Committee focused on current developments in Russia and the forthcoming elections, as well as on the situation in the former Yugoslavia. The meeting, which was chaired by the Committee's Co-Chair, Piero Fassino of the Italian Democratic Party of the Left, PDS, attracted a large participation, with representatives of all the main social democratic formations in Russia attending, including the leaders of the Russian Social Democratic Union and other members of the Social Democratic Bloc, of the Social Democratic Party of Russia, and of the Party of Socially Oriented Democracy. The Committee also welcomed contributions from individual guests including Mikhail Gorbachev and representatives of the city government of Moscow. Along with delegates of SI member parties in Central, Eastern and Western Europe, guests also attended from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Ukraine. The growth of our activities and contacts, and of interest in the Socialist International, in Russia and in the whole of Central and Eastern Europe, was most evident from this gathering. Whilst in Moscow for the Committee meeting, I also had the opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister of Russia, Viktor Chernomyrdin.

Our Committee for Central and Eastern Europe adopted a resolution underlining the great significance of the Russian parliamentary elections and calling for fair conditions and open access to the media for all electoral lists. It also called on all Russian citizens to exercise their vote and expressed support for all those Russian democratic forces founded on the values of democratic socialism.

Whilst in Moscow, the members of SICEE also discussed the situation in Azerbaijan and passed a resolution deplored the human rights violations and political detentions in that country.

In its resolution on the former Yugoslavia, the Committee welcomed the agreement on principles signed in Geneva in September and urged a number of specific measures by all sides to consolidate the ceasefire. Since then, of course, there have been further long-awaited positive developments towards the ending of this terrible conflict in the heart of Europe, and no

doubt our discussions in Brussels will reflect the firm support of our International for all those seeking a peaceful solution.

As a manifestation of that support, SI President Pierre Mauroy and myself, Jean-François Vallin, Secretary General of the Party of European Socialists, together with Michel Thauvin, Chef de Cabinet of the SI President, and Maurice Lazar, advisor to the SI President, visited Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in November. In Zagreb we met the leaderships of all the social democratic formations in Croatia: the Social Democratic Party, SPD, the Social Democratic Union, and the Social Democratic Action, ASH. We were able to travel on from Zagreb to Sarajevo, where we met the leaders of the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Union of Bosnian Social Democrats and the Citizens' Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as ministers of the Bosnian Government and members of the Presidency, officials of the Croat National Council and the Serbian Citizens' Council, and officers of the United Nations Protection Force, UNPROFOR. We also had the opportunity to talk with members of the Association of Independent Intellectuals and visited an independent television and radio station.

I then went on to Tuzla, where I met our friend and colleague Selim Beslagic, the Mayor of that city and Leader of the Union of Bosnian Social Democrats, and other members of the social democratic administration of Tuzla, representing both the UBSD and the SDP.

This visit to Croatia and, in particular, to Bosnia was an invaluable opportunity to see the situation for ourselves and to appreciate the extent of the task of peacemaking and reconstruction now facing the Bosnian people, in which they will need all our support and cooperation.

III

Turning to the Middle East, the whole of our International has been stunned and grief-stricken by the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Whilst joining our Israeli comrades in mourning their courageous leader, our Vice-President and friend, we join them too in the commitment to continue on the path of peace opened up by Yitzhak Rabin's government. The new Prime Minister of Israel and Leader of the Israel Labour Party, our friend of many years Shimon Peres, has our fullest support and solidarity. In that context, the SI Middle East Committee is meeting in Brussels on the eve of our Council meeting to review the situation in the Middle East and the Socialist International's contribution to advancing the peace process, as well as to prepare a draft resolution on the subject for adoption by the Council.

IV

The SI Human Rights Committee, chaired by Peter Jankowitsch of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, is also meeting in Brussels. Taking into account the perspectives and priorities it has been developing during the last few years, the Committee will begin consideration of "A Socialist International Human Rights Agenda for the 21st Century." It will also discuss the elimination of the death penalty and other human rights concerns. The SICOHR will prepare draft resolutions for adoption by the Council in Brussels.

The SI Africa Committee will hold its next meeting in February 1996 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. In preparation for that meeting, I visited Burkina Faso in October, at the invitation of our member party, the Party for Democracy and Progress. As well as discussing our planned meeting, I was able to see and hear about the situation in that country and to hold extensive talks with leaders of the PDP. Those talks focused very much on the ongoing, and far from simple, democratisation process in much of Africa. This has been at the heart of our discussions, as it will be, no doubt, at the next Committee meeting.

Our concern in these recent months has been particularly for our member party the Ivory Coast Popular Front, FPI. The presidential and parliamentary elections in that country have now taken place, in far from satisfactory conditions. Indeed, such was the disquiet of opposition parties with regard to the electoral code and electoral lists, together with increasing repression of opposition activity, that their candidates, including FPI Leader Laurent Gbagbo, withdrew from the presidential poll. We have also been very concerned about the situation in Equatorial Guinea, where there were strong indications of irregularity in the counting of votes in the recent municipal elections, and we continue to express our support for our friends in the Convergencia Para La Democracia Social. At the same time, we were pleased to note the very strong showing by the African National Congress, ANC, in the recent municipal elections in South Africa.

In Nigeria, the executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other defenders of minority rights have produced worldwide repudiation and our International has condemned these acts in unequivocal terms.

A meeting of the SI Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean is also planned for early 1996. There have been some significant political developments in the region, which will no doubt be addressed by the Committee. The Chair of the Committee, our Vice-President José Francisco Peña Gómez, was endorsed in November as presidential candidate of the Dominican Revolutionary Party, PRD, which he leads, and its electoral allies in the Santo Domingo Accord. The election is scheduled for May 1996, following the electoral reforms agreed to by all parties after the unsatisfactory elections of 1994. In Haiti, there is, unfortunately, some disquiet about developments during and since the recent parliamentary and

municipal elections, and as it faces the upcoming presidential election. In Argentina, the FREPASO coalition, which includes our member party the Popular Socialist Party, has consolidated its position after its advance in this year's general elections. In El Salvador, the peace process continues, but full compliance with the accords still needs to be encouraged.

In different parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, our member parties are increasingly involved in the process of economic integration, with the dual aims of promoting economic growth and ensuring that that growth benefits all sectors of society.

The SI Committee for Economic Development and the Environment will meet in the first months of the coming year in Lisbon, under the chairmanship of Portugal's new Prime Minister and SI Vice-President António Guterres.

Our Mediterranean Committee, chaired by Raimon Obiols of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, will also meet, and will have much to discuss in the wake of the first Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona. The situation in Algeria after the presidential election will also be of particular concern to the Committee.

All our Committees will be particularly active in the coming months, as they play their usual important role in preparations for next year's Socialist International Congress, and as we consider the expansion of our activities into the sphere of local and regional government.

V

Whilst in the former Yugoslavia with our President a few weeks ago, I saw for myself something of the extent and difficulty of the task which United Nations troops and civilian staff have carried out there. Much of our International's work continues to be related to United Nations activities and priorities. The UN has always had our strong support. We have made our contribution to the debate on the future of the Organisation and on possible changes to its structures. In this 50th anniversary year of the UN, we have reiterated our faith in its principles, our commitment to its aims and our pride in its record. As reported to the last Council, the consultative status of the Socialist International was recently upgraded, increasing our opportunities for active collaboration in the UN's work. In New York on 24 October, the largest-ever gathering of world leaders reaffirmed the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and pledged to give the twenty-first century a United Nations equipped, financed and structured to serve effectively the peoples in whose name it was established. Our International will be doing all it can to ensure that that pledge is honoured.

VI

I can report with pleasure some election successes for SI parties during recent months. In Portugal on 1 October, the Socialist Party won general elections and is now in government, under the Premiership of António Guterres, the Party leader and our Vice-President. The Social Democratic Party of Switzerland increased its support substantially in the general elections held on 22 October, and is now the largest party in parliament. We also learned with satisfaction of our friend Aleksander Kwasniewski's election as President of Poland. The Social Democratic Party of Guatemala was part of a new Centre-Left alliance that made a respectable showing in the recent general elections. In September the French Socialist Party increased its representation in the Senate, in voting by members of parliament, local and regional councillors. Meanwhile, the Nepali Congress Party returned to government in September at the head of a new coalition, formed after the parliamentary defeat of the Communist administration which had been elected last year. And in Venezuela, Democratic Action, AD, made impressive gains in the recent regional elections.

VII

I can also report that since we met in Cape Town I have been privileged to see some of our member parties at work on their home ground. During the recent period I attended the Congress of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, where Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky was re-elected Party Leader, shortly before the calling of early general elections in Austria. I represented the Socialist International at the annual Conference of the British Labour Party. I attended the National Convention of the French Socialist Party, where Lionel Jospin was elected Party Leader, as well as the Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, where the Party also elected a new Leader, Oskar Lafontaine, and the Congress of our fraternal organisation, the International Union of Socialist Youth, which was held in Italy.

VIII

The Council will be asked in Brussels to approve a Budget for our work in the coming year, 1996. The pace and scope of that work will be evident from this report and from the more detailed reports which the chairs of various SI committees will present to our meeting in Brussels. I must reiterate here what I have stressed in all my recent reports to the Council. We carry out an increasingly extensive programme of work within a Budget which increases very little. We are proud of being able to do so much, but our task is made ever more difficult by the failure of some member parties to comply with their financial commitment to the International. I appeal most strongly to those member parties which are in arrears to ensure that fees are paid, and

draw their attention once again to the relevant articles of the International's Statutes.

IX

The Council should meet next on the eve of the XX Socialist International Congress, to be held in 1996. As we approach that event, the picture is a challenging one. The scope of SI activities is truly global. Our committees are active in every region and on a full range of important issues, and participation continues to grow. More and more parties from all around the world are applying for membership, and I have no doubt that following our XX Congress, the stature of the Socialist International will be yet further enhanced. Our activities do no more than make manifest the relevance of our ideals and the strength of our principles which brings inspiration to so many.
