

just news

Urgent action needed

NGLTF targets crackdown on Soviet gays

by Rex Wockner

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has sent what it calls "a series of hard-hitting communiques" to government officials in Leningrad, Moscow and Washington, condemning the recent increased harassment of Soviet gay activists and demanding intervention by Soviet and American authorities.

The news of escalating police and bureaucratic attacks on the Soviet gay movement was reported in the Jan. *Just Out*. The crackdown has included:

- In mid-December, Moscow Gay and Lesbian Union founder Roman Kalinin and other activists were summoned to police headquarters where their finances were scrutinized.

- The same week, police visited Kalinin's parents and ordered them to silence him.

- At the same time, Kalinin was evicted from his apartment because of his political activities.

- Meanwhile, Olga Zhuk, a Leningrad lesbian leader, was charged with violation of the male-sodomy law when she tried to register the city's new gay group with the City Council. The charges were later dropped. Lesbian sex is not illegal in the USSR. Zhuk says police subsequently harassed her on the street and stole her organization's papers from her apartment.

- A short time earlier, in November, Moscow gay activist Alexander Lukeshev, publisher of the independent democratic newspaper *New Life*, was brutally murdered and his body set on fire in

his apartment. Government newspapers blamed the murder on a jealous teenaged lover. MGLU blamed it on the KGB.

• In the past year, MGLU activists have been beaten by police during AIDS demonstrations, MGLU documents were stolen from Kalinin's apartment, activists were taken into custody as ACT UP/Chicago members delivered condoms to them, the KGB demanded that MGLU cease publishing its newspaper, *Tema*, and police violently raided a gay cafe in the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

Several members of Congress have joined NGLTF in responding to reports of the escalating crackdown on the Soviet Union's fledgling gay movement, sending telegrams to the Moscow and Leningrad City Councils. NGLTF is also lobbying Amnesty International to intervene in the crisis.

NGLTF and the International Lesbian and Gay Association urge protest telegrams to (1) The Commission for Social and Political Organizations, dom 6, Isakovskaya Ploshad, Lensovet, Leningrad, USSR. (2) Mr. Gavriil Popov, Moss-ovet, Moscow, USSR. Telegrams are necessary because the mail is too slow.

Copies of all telegrams and letters should be sent to (1) John Healey, Executive Director, Amnesty International-USA, 322 8th Ave., New York, NY 10001. (2) International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 8DJ, England.

England's first

Queen dubs first openly gay knight

by Rex Wockner

Famed Shakespearean actor Ian McKellen, who is openly gay, was knighted on New Year's Eve by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II.

British gay and lesbian activists were shocked at the news, coming as it did in the midst of a rapidly deteriorating atmosphere for the gay movement (see World Briefs: England).

McKellen was chosen for the honor by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's administration shortly before she left office. Knights are selected because of their service to the country, pre-eminence in the arts or, sometimes, because of political connections.

The response from the gay community has been mixed. Filmmaker Derek Jarman, who is openly gay and an open person with AIDS, wrote an article for the *Guardian*, a major daily newspaper, saying that McKellen should reject his

knighthood because the Tory administration that bestowed it is anti-gay.

The next day, 18 gay and lesbian actors, directors, producers, playwrights and others—only seven of whom were previously out of the closet—wrote a letter to the *Guardian*, mass-outing themselves. The group called McKellen's knighthood "a significant landmark in the history of the British Gay Movement."

"Never again will public figures be able to claim that they have to keep secret their homosexuality in fear of it damaging their careers," the group wrote. "Ian McKellen provides an inspiration to us all, not only as an artist of extraordinary gifts, but as a public figure of remarkable honesty and dignity."

McKellen is currently on a world tour, performing Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Richard III*.

world briefs

BRAZIL: The Costa Rican gay newspaper *Confidencial* reports that the county of Rio de Janeiro has banned discrimination based on sexual orientation. Reports say Brazil faces an epidemic of anti-gay murders and that transvestites are required to carry official ID's confirming their choice to dress as women.

CANADA: The Ontario government Jan. 1 extended life, medical and dental insurance to lovers of gay/lesbian provincial employees—a first for Canada. At the same time, officials announced plans to alter provincial laws and the Ontario Human Rights Act so that the definition of "family" includes gay/lesbian partners; this would extend benefits into the civil sector.

And, the gay city councilors in Montreal and Vancouver, Raymond Blain and Gordon Price, were both re-elected in Nov., *Go Info* said.

CHILE: The group Ayuquelén is organizing Chile's first lesbian conference, according to *Confidencial*. Spokeswoman Lilian Inostroza said, "We're going to organize our conference—to break the isolation and get together with our sisters who are working in the interior of the nation."

COSTA RICA: Police have stepped up harassment of gay bars in this peaceful Central American nation. The bar raids coincide with the birth of the nation's first gay newspaper, *Confidencial*, but there is no immediate evidence that the events are related. The emerging gay and lesbian community in San Jose, the capital, has also announced plans for the country's first gay-pride parade this June. "The event will be announced to the international press so that they will be present to secure our physical safety," reported *Confidencial*.

ENGLAND: A judge effectively criminalized all sadomasochistic sex, even among consenting adults in their own homes, sending 15

gay men to prison for up to four-and-one-half years each after Scotland Yard confiscated homemade S/M-sex videos from their homes.

• The new Criminal Justice Bill, currently working its way through parliament, will punish men caught having sex in public lavatories and similar places with penalties equal to those for rape.

• New foster-parenting guidelines from the Department of Health state that "equal rights and gay rights have no place in fostering services."

NEW ZEALAND: An AGN-McNair survey of 1,786 voters found that 75 percent believe discrimination based on sexual orientation should be illegal.

NORWAY: Oslo's Gay Health Committee has installed bird feeders full of condoms in the recreation areas of Lake Sognsvann and Huk Woods—home to a popular nude beach. Another dispenser was hung at Hercules, the gay sauna. "They have to be refilled every day," said spokesman Geir Lindal. (*Fritt Fram*)

SOUTH AFRICA: The African National Congress has included a gay-rights law in its draft bill of rights for the new South African constitution.

The ANC is one of the nation's largest black political parties, headed by anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela.

The move followed heavy lobbying from Cape Town's Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists. "We are very excited and consider this a major victory for the lesbian and gay movement," said OLGA spokesman Derrick Fine.

THAILAND: The World Health Organization pulled out of a major AIDS conference in Bangkok in late December in protest of a Thai law that denies travel visas to persons with AIDS.

Compiled by Rex Wockner

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