

world briefs

AUSTRALIA

The Cabinet of the state of New South Wales has endorsed proposals to ban discrimination against transsexuals and allow post-operative transsexuals to change their birth certificates, reported Dominic O'Grady in the gay newspaper *Brother Sister*. The breakthrough clears the way for Parliament to debate the "tranny" (as transsexuals are called in Australia) reforms and pass legislation.

State Attorney General Geoff Shaw, who took the proposals to the Cabinet, said Parliament would be asked to amend the Anti-Discrimination Act and the Birth, Deaths and Marriages Act sometime in mid-November.

Shaw is also pushing legislation that would extend the legal rights of marriage to same-sex couples.

CANADA

Svend Robinson, one of Canada's two openly gay members of Parliament, barely lost out to become leader of the leftist New Democratic Party at the party's convention Oct. 14 in Ottawa.

According to Reuter news service, Robinson, of British Columbia, received the most votes but decided to give his support to Nova Scotia's Alexa McDonough after it became clear he was unlikely to win in a second ballot.

McDonough is considered less leftist than Robinson.

CUBA

Cuba's policy of quarantining people with HIV in special sanitariums has resulted in an AIDS rate of only 0.8 cases per 100,000 people. That rate is one of the lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean, reported *The Miami Herald* on Oct. 16.

"People are beginning to see that what we did works," said Reinaldo G. Gil, the epidemiologist in charge of the Health Ministry's AIDS program.

FRANCE

France's Ministry of Health announced on Oct. 10 that that country's socialized-medicine system will pay for combination antiretroviral therapy for people with HIV.

Recent trial studies have shown that people taking combos such as AZT-ddI and AZT-ddC have a 38 percent lower death rate than those taking AZT alone.

NEW ZEALAND

District Councillor Georgina Beyer, 38, was elected mayor of Carterton, a conservative rural town, on Oct. 14.

She may be the world's first transsexual mayor. Beyer previously achieved the distinction of being the first openly transsexual elected official in New Zealand.

A nationally known actor and former prostitute who had a sex-change operation in 1984, Beyer moved to the small community in 1990 and was elected to the council in 1993, where she has championed the causes of the homeless and the unemployed.

"The Carterton-area people are pretty conservative, but a lot of people wanted something different to happen to the council," Beyer explained, attributing her landslide win over two opponents to her "vim and vigor."



Thirty-seven members of the New Zealand Parliament wrote a letter to Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe in late October denouncing his aggressive verbal gay-bashing.

The letter was initiated by gay MP Chris Carter.

The MPs wrote, "We are sure that, as a black African who grew to adulthood in a white-dominated Rhodesia, you understand that discrimination is usually based on ignorance."

The letter urged Mugabe to emulate South Africa and 'extend legal' protections based on

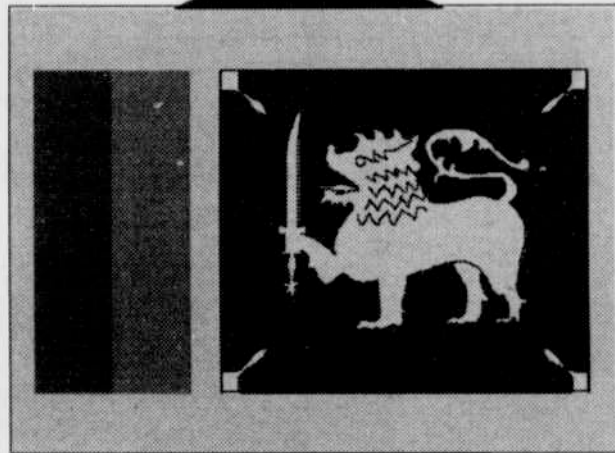
sexual orientation. South Africa is the only nation in the world with a constitutional ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Mugabe has repeatedly denounced homosexuals since Aug. 1, when the group Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe garnered international attention by being banned from a state-run book fair.

SRI LANKA

The founder of a gay-rights group in Sri Lanka recently spoke at length with the Reuter news service. Sherman de Rose, head of Companions on a Journey, said the gay population of Sri Lanka "is larger than the world average...but a lot of them cannot come to terms with themselves, mostly due to family pressures and behavioral expectations called for by their culture."

De Rose, a former special-education teacher, added, "A 'gay identity' does not make much sense to many homosexuals in Sri Lanka. It's a foreign word and has a foreign meaning. A gay identity must emerge from the Sri Lankan cultural context. [But] on the whole, the incidents of men having sex with men and women having sex with women are quite high."



The group has 400 male and 13 female members. "The number of women will always remain low...because Sri Lankan women are many times more unlikely than men to admit their homosexuality," de Rose said. "It may be because women are governed more by traditional and cultural expectations."

The group will stage a national conference next March, entitled "Emerging Gay Identities in Sri Lanka," with hopes of formulating a national gay agenda.

"Often Sri Lankan homosexuals have committed suicide because they had no support from their families, from their community and from the state," de Rose said. "We want to change that attitude."

Sri Lankan law punishes male-male sex with 12 years in prison. Lesbian sex is not banned, probably because lawmakers have never thought about it.

Sri Lanka is an island about the size of West Virginia located off the southeast tip of India. It was formerly called Ceylon. There are 17 million residents, 70 percent of whom are Buddhist.

A civil war that has been ongoing for 12 years—in which the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are battling the Sinhalese majority for a Tamil homeland—continues to wreak general havoc.

SWEDEN

Twenty gay men and lesbians demonstrated outside the Zimbabwean Embassy in Stockholm on Oct. 19 to denounce anti-gay statements made by that country's president, Robert Mugabe.

The demonstrators demanded that Mugabe stop bashing gays and that Sweden reduce its \$150 million aid program to Zimbabwe to punish the leader.

Sweden is one of three nations where same-sex marriage has been legalized.

Compiled by Rex Wockner. Brett Sheppard contributed to the items on New Zealand.

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