

National News

Pope intervenes again against death penalty

Writing on behalf of Pope John Paul II, the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States has appealed for clemency for Scotty Moore, an Oklahoma man scheduled to be executed on June 3. The Nuncio, Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, wrote to the members of the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board in Oklahoma City: "His Holiness counts on your right to spare a life by commuting Mr. Moore's sentence with a gesture of mercy that would hopefully contribute to the promotion of nonviolence in today's society. As you know, the Holy Father's appeals to end the death penalty have become more and more frequent and pressing, especially as the new Millennium draws near."

In January, Pope John Paul II appealed for an end to the death penalty in *Ecclesia in America* (The Church in America), an Apostolic Exhortation which he released in Mexico City following the synod of American bishops.

West Point graduates first Cambodian cadet

On May 29, the eldest son of Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen of Cambodia became the first Cambodian to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Hun Manet will attend New York University in the fall to study economics, and, as required, has four years active duty to serve in the Cambodian military.

It is a miracle that Hun Manet is even alive. He is the second child born to Hun Sen and Bun Rany; the first-born, also a son, died during the Khmer Rouge period. Hun Manet was born in 1977, while his mother was being held in a Khmer Rouge prison, at a time when internal purges of the Khmer Rouge were focussing on the Eastern District Command, where Hun Sen was deployed. In order to escape the purge, and to avoid carrying out orders for his unit to massacre a Vietnamese village across the border, Hun Sen and fellow soldiers escaped into Vietnam.

They were held prisoner by the Vietnamese for some weeks, and, in 1979, returned to Cambodia, backed by the Vietnamese military, to overthrow the Khmer Rouge. Hun Sen saw Hun Manet for the first time in 1979.

In an interview with *EIR* ("Cambodian Prime Minister Seeks Reconciliation through Reconstruction," Feb. 12, 1999), Samdech Hun Sen agreed that Hun Manet would be a good candidate to become Cambodia's first astronaut, but said that he must first master the science of nation-building.

The only person annoyed that Hun Sen attended his son's graduation was U.S. Rep. Ben Gilman (R-N.Y.). The China-basher chairman of the House International Relations Committee growled something to the press about human rights violations, but agreed that, "As a father, I guess he's certainly entitled to be here."

Venezuela's Hugo Chávez snubbed by Clinton

Venezuela's Foreign Ministry reported on May 28 that President Bill Clinton sent a letter to Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez on June 1, informing the Jacobin head of state that he regretted that he could not find time in his schedule for a meeting with him, when he comes to the United States in early June. The letter suggests that their aides "explore the possibilities" that, maybe, they could meet in September during the UN General Assembly. Chávez was in New York on June 8-10, for meetings with the powers of Wall Street.

Chávez has been trying to get an official meeting with President Clinton since he was elected on Dec. 6, 1998. When he visited Washington in January, Chávez was received by National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, and Clinton "dropped in" to be introduced. Chávez later reported that Clinton had invited him back to Washington, but a National Security Council official clarified that it had been Vice President Al Gore who had invited Chávez to attend Gore's anti-corruption conference in January (see *EIR*, Feb. 5, "Gore Pushes Bureaucracies for a Fascist World Order").

There are presently two publicly contentious issues between the United States and

the Chávez regime: first, the issue of "democracy," and State Department concerns over Chávez's moves to style himself as a "democratic" dictator; and second, Chávez's announcement in mid-May, that his government will not grant U.S. military airplanes involved in anti-drug surveillance, overflight rights over Venezuelan airspace. The United States is basing regional anti-drug operations now out of the Netherlands Antilles and Ecuador, following the closure of the Howard U.S. Air Force base in Panama this spring. Planes flying out of the Netherlands Antilles need to pass through Venezuelan airspace, to cover Colombian drug routes.

School privatization and other looting schemes

The Florida National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has announced that it will file a lawsuit to block a Florida plan—already passed in the legislature—for a school voucher system, which uses public school budget funds for children to attend private schools. The plan, which is expected to be signed by Gov. Jeb Bush, will make Florida the first to have a statewide voucher program. The NAACP's argument, according to Florida conference President Leon Russell, is that the vouchers would siphon off money badly needed for public school education. This is, in fact, the point of school vouchers, and their evil twin "charter schools," which claim to make schools better by introducing competition—which ultimately ends in consolidation of the private schools, and shutting down neighborhood schools, especially in poor districts.

One of Jeb Bush's collaborators in the African-American political scene, T. Willard Fair, president of the Miami Urban League, has gotten money from the neo-conservative Institute for Justice to intervene in court on the side of the state to push through the voucher plan. In 1996, Fair and Bush founded the Liberty City Charter School in one of the poorest black neighborhoods in Miami. Fair is a fervent supporter of school privatization, with the argument that it forces public schools to perform better.

Despite the hot air in Florida that the quality of education in charter schools is better, because class sizes are smaller, the major selling point is purely monetary: In 1996-97, the school boards in the Florida charter experiment allocated only \$8,600 per student for school buildings, whereas the public education buildings allocated \$13,000 per student.

Another budget flim-flam is being pursued in California, playing off education against county budgets. New figures released by the state government show that most of the state's \$4.3 billion "budget surplus" has come largely from looting \$3.6 billion from counties. In 1997, voters approved a ballot initiative which would allocate a greater share of local property taxes to public education. Previously, this money was paid into county governments for local budget expenses. The state government took advantage of the new law to commensurately reduce its funding for public education. Thus, in 1999, the \$3.6 billion in funding for public education was shifted from the state budget to the counties.

Not surprisingly, the counties hardest hit have been the large urban areas, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Alameda. In Alameda County, this year, the fire department is \$1 million short of funds as a result of this looting. Many other county agencies and programs are facing cuts or budget crises.

Michigan to test welfare recipients for drugs

Michigan plans to be the first state, beginning Oct. 1, that will require drug tests for all adult public assistance recipients under 65 years old. Which method of testing will be used, whether samples will be of urine, sweat, or hair follicles, has not yet been decided, but the cost is \$40 per test.

The lame excuse proffered by Conservative Revolutionary Gov. John Engler, is that the state wants to make more welfare recipients employable, and therefore wants to identify those people who have a drug problem. Under Engler, Michigan pioneered throwing families off public assistance in 1992, dropping cases 60% from

225,359 to 89,866 families.

The plan will rob anyone receiving public assistance of their constitutional rights, and the law may face a court challenge by the American Civil Liberties Union, on the ground that it violates the Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable search and seizure. Opponents also argue that the mandatory testing is demeaning, as well as extremely expensive, and takes money away from benefits needed to alleviate poverty.

Several other states that passed such laws have used questionnaires instead of universal drug screening, but the use of testing is widespread. Jeb Bush's Florida set up a pilot program last year, where all welfare applicants have to answer questionnaires; testing is then conducted on "those [the state] has reasonable cause to believe use drugs." Variations of these programs are under way in Louisiana, New York, Maryland, New Jersey, South Carolina, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

Admiral favors military cooperation with China

Speaking to reporters in Singapore on May 22, Commander of the Pacific Command Adm. Dennis Blair said that China is "not a projection threat to anyone," even in the Asian region, and that the United States is ready to resume military cooperation. Blair was speaking in the aftermath of China's suspension of military exchanges with the United States, in response to the NATO bombing of its embassy in Belgrade.

According to Reuters, Blair said, "For my part as a Pacific commander, a number of the activities we had scheduled had been cancelled, and we are ready to resume when the Chinese are ready, so we are sort of ready and waiting." Blair told reporters that he favored consistent interaction with China: "I don't think that either in China or the U.S., we should be taking a cardboard cutout with the hole in the middle that says 'threat,' and poking a Chinese head through it on the one end and the U.S. head through the other." Admiral Blair added that he did not think that military interaction "should be turned on and off like a light switch when we have problems," by either side.

A NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC Institute for International Affairs delegation of 100 is living the high life in the ultra-chic Amandari Hotel in Bali, Indonesia, while slaving away to make sure the elections are truly democratic. Among those slogging away for democracy are former President Jimmy Carter and former U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia Paul Wolfowitz.

SCOTT RITTER, a U.S. member of the UNSCOM Iraqi inspection team, whom Baghdad accused of spying, has released a book calling for sanctions against Iraq to be lifted, according to a May 29 report in the *Times of India*. Ritter told a Minneapolis press conference: "If you want lasting peace, you have to think beyond disarming Iraq and think about rebuilding Iraq."

AL GORE was the butt of nearly a full page of jokes in the Style section of the *Washington Post* on June 7. Opening with a cartoon of Gore as a cigar store Indian, Katie Graham's *Post* describes the effect Gore has on people, as "MEGO": my eyes glaze over.

'ALEXANDER PUSHKIN DAY' was proclaimed on June 4 in Washington, D.C. at the groundbreaking for a statue of the great Russian poet. June 6 was the 200th anniversary of Puskin's birth. In Northern Virginia, *EIR* staff also celebrated, with poetry recitations and musical performances spanning Pushkin, Schiller, Shakespeare, Keats, Taras Shevchenko, Beethoven, and musical settings of Pushkin verses.

ALICE RIVLIN, like Robert Rubin an ally of President Clinton in the financial world, resigned from her post as vice chairman of the Federal Reserve on June 3. One dismayed European banker told *EIR* that she "was a major voice for the argument that the traditional Fed monetarism and preemptive interest rate hikes were not appropriate."