

## C O M M E N T A R Y

## Gay couples do deserve respect, not full equality

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

As regular readers of this column know, I usually have pretty clear views on most social policy issues. But I confess that I have mixed feelings about same-sex marriages. Not only am I in a quandary, I've been in one for weeks as I've tried to look at this issue from both sides. And when I do that, I end up right back where I suspect a lot of people are — torn between feeling that homosexuals should not be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation and believing that same-sex marriages should not be sanctioned by the government or the church.

I know this disclosure will not please many of my friends on the Left. And while many on the Right might take some comfort in my discomfort, I am not in total agreement with them, either. This weight of arguments advanced by both camps places me in the position of being able to see the merits of each position.

I am a Christian and my religious beliefs don't allow me to accept homosexuality as normal behavior. Sorry about that, friends, but we must part company on this one. And I know that the Bible admonishes us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. I can and do love my neighbor without agreeing that the church should sanction marriage between couples of the same sex. Even Little Richard jokes that God created a union between Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.

To thousands, I know this is no joking matter. And while I believe that the government shouldn't sanction gay marriages, I understand why some gays and lesbians want to enjoy the same privileges that married couples covet — the right to make life or death health care decisions for an



GEORGE CURRY

incapacitated partner, to be entitled to financial proceeds that were jointly created and to be entitled to all benefits extended to a surviving spouse.

Some states and cities are trying to duck the issue by legitimizing civil unions between members of the same gender, a distinction without a difference. There is no acceptable alternative to this alternative life style and we shouldn't pretend otherwise.

Gays and lesbians need to get real, too. It irks me that so many of them try to equate their struggle with the Civil Rights Movement. And some of my friends in the movement, in an effort to be politically correct, are reluctant to challenge such nonsense. Sure there are some things that are common to both movements, but except in limited individual cases, gays and lesbians have never suffered anything approaching the oppression of African-Americans. They were not lynched because they were gay, they were not brought here in chains because of their sexual orientation, they were not deprived of the right to vote because they like people of the same gender, and no White girl in the United States has ever been killed for whistling at a White woman.

Still, homosexuals should not be barred from employment because of their sexual orientation. I don't think people should be automatically kicked out of the military because they are gay or lesbian. And they should have the legal right to do whatever they want in the privacy of their homes, including engaging in what the Bible describes as ungodly behavior.

The difficulty arises, at least for me, when gays and lesbians want their aberrant sexual behavior — yes, I said aberrant — sanctioned by the public and placed on

(See Curry, Page 12)

## Black power growing among Brazil leaders

By Ron Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Just back from Brazil speaking to a conference of Black legislators, I now realize that this was one of the most "historic" meetings in this hemisphere. When you looked on the stage of the closing plenary session in Brasilia, there were assembled at least 15 Black



RON WALTERS

legislators, not only from the Brazilian Parliament, but from Columbia, Uruguay, Panama, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and from many other places in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Because members of the Congressional Black Caucus were forced to remain state-side because of the intense debate on the Medicare legislation, the president of its foundation, Weldon Rogeau, and its vice president for research, Maya Rockeymore, were there. The rest of us activists and scholars, were guest of the sponsors, the Black Brazilian Parliamentary Caucus.

The meeting resembled the annual gathering of the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington, DC in that there were many concurrent panel sessions discussing a variety of policy issues that dominated the life of Blacks in the Americas. Panelist addressed these issues from the point of view of their own countries, as well as making comments on other countries as well.

We sometimes are in rush to characterize meeting such as this as "historic," but my mind goes back just 15 years ago when I started going down to Brazil. I was often invited to speak at conferences where the issue was racial identity, in a context where there was very little, especially Black racial identity.

I will never forget going to the Parliament in Brasilia in the late 1980s and being introduced to Benedita da Silva, a Black

female member of the Brazilian House of Representatives (now a cabinet secretary) who could not speak English. But she said to me (through an interpreter) that there were only three Blacks in their Congress at that time — or three who admitted that they were Black. Today, there are at least 15 who are Black and proud to admit it.

One of the most fiery leaders was the sponsor of this conference, Louis Alberto, head of the Brazilian Black Caucus. It was good to see that both he and other members such as the moderator of my panel, Congressman Reginald Germano, were not only clear about the existence of racism in Brazil, but forceful in their denunciation of it and pushing to support measures such as affirmative action.

The same was true of other delegates, and most especially I was impressed with the member of Parliament from Ecuador, Rafael Erazo.

Rep. Erazo explained that the situation of Blacks in Ecuador was like that of other Latin American countries where Blacks were few and the majority of the population was either Indian or mestizo (mixture of White settlers and Indians). He said that the level of Black consciousness was largely located among the leaders, but growing, and that they were determined to fight racism.

The fight against racism in Latin America is hard because the people do not attribute their oppression to being Black and they do not connect Blackness to being poor. Yet, the connection can be very obvious sometimes; my host put us in a beautiful upscale hotel on a lake just outside of the city. But when the conference was over and all of the Black people left, I noted twice that in the huge dining room,

(See Walters, Page 12)

## Global human rights tough sell in times of George W.

By Bill Fletcher Jr.  
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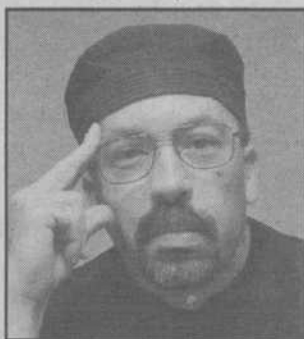
International Human Rights Day was observed this week and I must confess that I have mixed feelings about the way that it is celebrated. Consider for a moment: the Bush administration breaks international law and precedent in invading Iraq under the pretext of seeking weapons of mass destruction. It all turns out to be a lie. When the lie is exposed, what do we hear? That the REAL objective of the aggression was to bring about human rights for the Iraqi people!

There is a long history of various US administrations using the language of human rights very selectively. Palestinians are being massacred every day by the Israeli Defense Forces and this is somehow not a human rights abuse. Saddam Hussein murdered political opponents in Iraq's left-wing, and that was not a human rights abuse. When the alliances shift, Saddam Hussein's abuses become human rights violations and justifi-

cations for invasions.

But let's bring it closer to home. Workers, internationally, are supposed to have a right to what is called freedom of association. This is supposed to mean, at least according to the International Labor Organization and the United Nations, that workers have a right to freely, and without interference from govern-

ments or employers, choose whether or not they want to join or form a labor union. The United States, according to the National Labor Relations Act passed in 1935 is supposed to have a public policy that favors the self-organization of workers and their right to collective bargaining. Despite all of this, workers in the USA have no such right, yet when human rights are discussed by the Bush administration or other paragons of virtue, nothing is ever said about this.



BILL FLETCHER JR.

Workers can attempt to join or form a union, get fired by the employer and it will often take years for them to get their jobs back unless there is massive pressure on the employer or government. Yet, this is not called a human rights abuse. In other words, we are permitted to have a law on the books that says that we can form or join unions, but in practice,

this right can be denied and the powers at be don't give a damn.

I recently discovered that some time ago Saddam Hussein issued an edit that workers in Iraq could not join or form unions. After the invasion and his overthrow, this edit has never been reversed by the U.S. occupation authority. So, for all the talk about human rights, when it comes down to it, there are convenient human rights issues that play on television, and then there are real human

rights issues that affect the living conditions of millions, issues that the Bush administration and their lackeys feel quite comfortable ignoring.

With each December 10th I feel almost embarrassed by any establishment discussion of human rights. The reality is that they do not mean it. Their cynical usage of the term serves to demonize those enemies that it has at any one moment, and ignore those allies who may be committing outright atrocities. It sounds all too familiar. In fact, it is part of the story line from George Orwell's famous book 1984. Today's enemy has always been our enemy. Yesterday's enemy is to be forgotten. Tomorrow's enemy, who knows?

Yes, human rights, but human rights must be practiced and enforced consistently, not just when it serves the objectives of an administration and its game of power politics.

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