

Petersburg Federal Correctional Complex
Virginia Hall
P.O. Box 1000
Petersburg, VA 23804

July 22, 2007

Dear Friends:

As I approach the tenth anniversary of being an involuntary guest of the state, the news of the court's decision to grant a hearing on my appeal has brought forth unexpected optimism - real enough even though held within bounds by previous disappointments. Also unexpected is the urgency with which I ask myself if during these years of incarceration I have remained a part of the world, who and what I was. It is a question too of how relevant my outlook is and will be to the life I will one day reenter (be that in 2012 or be that sooner).

No particular insight is required to see that the world has changed in this time, nor to see that much of this has been for the worse not better: looming environmental disaster; the war in Iraq; the growth of inequality in myriad directions, all parts of a long and growing list. Yet there is another side; witness the truth of Lincoln's dictum that you can't fool all the people all the time, demonstrated by the Republicans' 2006 defeat. A small step forward, perhaps, but far preferable to the big steps backward we as a society have taken of late. A large step forward, I believe, is being taken by people in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador - people who are trying to take the future in their collective hands. The contrast from 1997, when radical change seemed nowhere on the agenda anywhere in the world, is particularly striking. I realize it is easy to be swept away by the spirit of change abroad and ignore all the obstacles still to be overcome; but in my opinion it is in the willingness to face these challenges that hope lies. Moreover, it is far preferable than being swept away by the more prevalent spirit of cynicism or despair (life's disappointments should never blind anyone from again seeing the beauty of a smile).

Change in Latin America has been hopeful because it is built on unity that respects differences, because as of today it has allowed unity between those who want to press forward more quickly, those who see the need for a slower pace. It is with this in mind that I welcomed the formation of the Left Party in Germany. Created jointly by the Party of Democratic Socialism which emerged out of the old GDR and the predominately West German Alternative Electoral Alliance (WASG) rooted among dissident SPD members and trade unionists, it provides the possibility to overcome lines of division that have only impeded the struggle for social justice, for socialism. I know many friends in Germany are disappointed because of compromise over questions of program and history the Left Party has made. I have observed, however, that the critique of those compromises has itself contributed to a process of bringing into dialog people influenced by the New Left and from the traditional Marxist left (East and West). However slow a process this is, it is helping to clarify an explicit anti-capitalist politics that has the potential to engage younger people opposed to neo-liberalism, opposed to the violence directed at asylum seekers, and opposed to the neo-fascist revival that have found their place in re-united Germany.

Taken together, these developments represent not nearly so large a step forward as that which we see in Latin America, but a bigger step forward than what we have been able to achieve in the U.S. since those elections a year ago (though I realize much may take place of which I am unaware). I also can't help thinking of its relevance - bearing in mind all the differences of time and place - to the too short-lived experience we had of the Rainbow Coalition, wondering if or when or how we might be able to create forms of organization broad and unified while also diverse and critical; able to bridge the gap of difference over understanding the tempo and depth of change needed. That possibility I see when I look at changes within international labor, where most of my energies had gone prior to 1997. New and reformed organizations help create, I believe, a framework in which the internecine battles of the past - and manipulation of such by the CIA - can be avoided. The challenge will be to give this content at a local union level and, while I am in no position to be involved as I was (a reality no less painful for being self-evident), it is a challenge I am confident will be met.

Meanwhile I continue to live in the here and now - trying to stay who I was doesn't mean living in the past - and I look for ways to give meaning to my life in this corner of Petersburg, Virginia. I recall a talk I gave at a DSA conference some years ago on the need to make our socialist politics relevant to the conflicts we face in daily life, and bring those realities of how we live our lives back into our socialist politics. If we separate who we are from how we live, we will only betray ourselves and our beliefs. It is in these terms I see my appeal, as an attempt to challenge my criminal conviction by affirming who I am and was, by affirming the essential thread that ran through all aspects of my political commitments, a thread which I find given expression in the developments that I have just noted. Beyond that, I spend my days doing a lot of walking and reading (not bad, really, if it weren't for that fence). After working for nearly seven years as a GED (high school equivalency) tutor, I am now employed in the prison library. While I do not want to exaggerate my impact, teaching did have its rewards, as in moments when someone found meaning in an old over-quoted poem that was new to him. I continue, too, to write articles longer and shorter, and consider myself fortunate to have an outlet for many of them in *Junge Welt* in Germany.

I do worry at times whether I will find my place in the world when I am again free to move within it; a concern shared virtually with everybody else locked up. Since I have been able to maintain more of a relationship with family and friends than I had thought possible, I do look to the future with some confidence. This latest appeal allows for a possibility I take seriously though I know the ruling can go either way. Whatever happens, I always will be grateful for the support given me.

Kurt Stand
www.klstand.net