

CIL'S MISSION

CIL provides an international forum for local grassroots groups to participate in dialogue across social, economic, religious, and ethnic boundaries. This kind of dialogue enables local groups to analyze their own situations from an international perspective and encourages new possibilities for mutual understanding and cooperation. The center was founded in 1985 by people from the Philippines, the USA and Germany.



CIL/USA dialogue
A CIL Newsletter

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What Does Democracy Look Like?

The word “democracy” has been much in the news lately. Democracy is almost universally regarded as a good thing, but what do people mean by it exactly? A core belief within CIL is that people everywhere should be able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Is that what we mean by “democracy?” If so, how do we practice it?

Such questions have surfaced in a number of CIL forums in recent months in the light of current events in the country and the world. How can people in the U.S. today effectively participate in decisions that profoundly affect our future?

Below are three reports of recent discussions within CIL on the meaning and practice of democracy. First, Cathryn Magno, Ph.D., an educator acting as an advisor to CIL’s Youth Program Crossing Boundaries describes her initial assessment of youth’s understanding of the word:

“Independence,” “Freedom,” “Struggle”

CIL’s Youth Practicing Democracy program attempts to make democracy, human rights and social change part of the everyday lives of the participating youth whose rights are compromised too often by the adults around them. When asked what democracy is, young people in the group could not readily answer.

After questioning some adults about what democracy is and how they practice it, the youth talked about the adult’s responses, adding insights of their own. One felt that independence and freedom are at the heart of democracy, and when questioned about what freedom is, she said, “When two of my friends are fighting, I can walk away.” While not directly connected to the politics of democracy, the sentiment is similar – we all have the right to make choices that will ensure our safety and well being.

Although these teens are not fluent in the language of politics, they
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Remembering Connie Fox

A dear friend of CIL for many years died on February 7. The day before the tragic household accident that cost her life, she sent a donation to CIL with this note: “We need Dona Quixotes like you to light our way!!” Our deepfelt sympathy to her family and close friends.

Organizational Notes

International Networking

CIL organizers will be participating in several international conferences in the coming months.

Executive Director, Virginia Dorgan, will travel to Barcelona, July 7-13, for the 2004 **Parliament of the World's Religions**. The theme of this meeting is "Pathways to Peace: The Wisdom of Listening." Jinny's contribution to this parliament builds on CIL's work of crossing boundaries of culture, ethnicity and religion. The theme emphasizing listening is so important in dialogue.

At the conference, Jinny will tell of the programs and processes that CIL uses to extend understanding and unity among international grassroots groups. This session also supports her other professional commitment as Campus Minister at Marymount Manhattan College. For more information about the parliament, go to www.cpwr.org.

Board Member Peggy Ray will be one of 60 participants at the **International Institute for Peace Education** in Istanbul from August 1-7. Co-sponsored by the Peace Studies program at Teachers College Columbia University and Sabanci University in Istanbul, the Institute's theme this year is "Human Security: Building a Culture of Peace." Conference aims are to develop strategies for promoting demilitarization, woman's and human rights, and non-violent methods of resolving conflicts.

Peggy expects to draw on CIL's experience with its current Communities in Dialogue project "Security: How Can We All Have It?"

In October, Board Member Laura Fernandez and her colleague Cathryn Magno will present CIL's youth programs, Crossing Boundaries and Youth Practicing Democracy, at "**We Can Hear You: Documenting Youth Voices For Social Justice**," a conference of educators in Cuba. Laura is director of the Incarcerated Mothers Program. Cathryn holds a doctorate in education, is a professor at Southern Connecticut University, and has been assisting in developing the educational objectives and outcomes

Coming Up

Sat., June 26, 9:45 a.m.: Visit to Hunt's Point in the Bronx to learn about the community's effort to combat asthma-inducing air pollution. Call CIL for details: 212-426-5818.

Sept., Date TBA: CIL will bring together voters with differing views to listen to (and not debate) one another.

Wed., Oct. 27: Annual Recognition Night. Guy Bennett of Christie's will return to conduct the live auction of international items.

Connecticut State University, and has helped develop the educational objectives and outcomes for CIL's youth programs.

Three representatives of the CIL board, Virginia Dorgan, Kathleen Kanet and Peggy Ray, will confer in Frankfurt, Germany in July with CIL's **German partners**. They will explore possibilities for future cooperation with the staff of CIL Germany.

Board Welcomes New Member

At its April meeting, the CIL board welcomed Lou Martarano to the board. Lou serves on a number of other boards and we feel fortunate that he is also giving time to CIL.

The Center of international Learning is a 501(c)3 organization and depends on individual contributions. Any contribution you can make in cash, stock, or a bequest will help to further our work. The address and phone number are on the cover of this newsletter. Thank you.

Democracy

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understand the importance of social change. In a discussion of one adult's definition of democracy as "struggle," the concept of equality was mentioned, and they gave examples of leaders who struggled for equal rights, such as Martin Luther King, Jr.

It was clear to the youth that the adults they interviewed did not all have a strong sense of what democracy is. Most of the adults saw their practice of democracy as consisting solely of voting.

YPD seeks to educate youth about avenues to address violations of human rights within a democracy. The youth will plan a local social change project that builds on their prior experiences. When they were asked if they personally had ever practiced democracy, the youth eagerly described what it was like to publicly demonstrate in Albany against the Rockefeller Drug Laws. One teen said that she felt "like a President, like a Senator... People listened to us – we got a lot done that day."

YPD will empower those young people to get a lot more done in the year to come.

"Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War"

Practicing democracy by voting depends on people's representatives telling the truth about what they are doing. Below, Virginia Dorgan reports on discussions following viewings of a compelling video:

In March and April CIL presented several viewings and discussions of the video "Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War." This 56-minute documentary gives an in-depth look at the arguments, speeches and declarations given by President Bush and his senior advisors before, during and after the war. Incomplete information, inaccuracies, contradictions, hype and spin are made evident. In addition, experts from inside the CIA, Pentagon and foreign service reveal distortions of information that were presented to the American public leading up to the war.

During the discussions, participants were astounded how the clips, which were familiar to them from newscasts over the year, pointed out the many flip-flops and shifting rationales for the war. We wondered how anyone aware of this could support the invasion.

Still, we recognized that people who support the current U. S. policy could gather an entirely different set of clips to support their case. They would consider our presentation biased and would not stay past the first five minutes.

One person commented that many voters have very little time to analyze complex national situations. She speculated that what they want is to feel secure. They want someone strong in charge so they and their families can feel safe. The confidence and beliefs of George Bush reassure them.

If you would like to see the video "Uncovered..." , you can order it for \$9.95 from <http://www.truthuncovered.com>.

Dilemmas concerning the practice of democracy also arose in a Living Room Dialogue about U.S. corporations profiting from the current privatization of the Iraqi economy. Peggy Ray reports:

Building Community, Taking Risks

Simon Harak, SJ, a founder of Voices in the Wilderness currently on the staff of the War Resisters League, spoke at a Living Room Dialogue on war profiteering in Iraq by U.S. corporations. He called the corporate leaders responsible

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Teens in the YPD program cast ballots in an election for global friends of youth.

CIL Commentary**Some Reflections on Democracy**

Democracy is a Greek word, more specifically an Athenian word, and means rule of the people. All Athenian citizens were radically equal in one sense. They all had the same opportunity and obligation to play a role in their government. Democracy in Athens was not mob rule, as it's sometimes portrayed by its enemies, but a highly structured system of self government based on random selection.

A system of lotteries controlled the election of almost all the officials and representatives of the Athenian government. All citizens had exactly the same chance to those offices, including the office of titular head of state. Every month a council that set the agenda for the assembly was selected by lot. The assembly, which had the final vote on everything, was the meeting of all the citizens gathered together. The Athenians literally governed themselves, hence their word, democracy, rule of the people.

A lottery or random selection is perfectly fair to all participants, but in Athens not everybody was allowed to participate. The city had strict limits on citizenship and only males over the age of 30 who could trace back their Athenian ancestry were full participants in the democracy. Everyone else was excluded from the otherwise random system. Women, slaves, and foreigners didn't participate at all. The Athenian democracy was scrupulously fair to citizens, but obviously unfair to everyone else.

Democracy today means something completely different to us than what the Athenians meant by the word. We don't use a system of lotteries to fill government offices and randomly assign people to our legislatures and courts. Instead we elect representatives who theoretically represent our interests and ideals. We may have fewer restrictions to citizenship, but we don't have a democracy, at least not in the way the Athenians did. We are ruled by elected representatives, bureaucrats and officials, and because the American electoral system is driven by money, democracy for us means the rule of moneyed interests. When representatives are bought and paid for by rich individuals, rich corporations and rich groups, only the rich are truly represented.

So, for us, democracy is a far weaker word and no longer means rule of the people, not if we're talking about democracy as it's actually practiced. The people don't rule in our system. Money rules, or rather the people who have it do, a type of government the Greeks called an oligarchy or rule of the few. Our political leaders consequently conflate democracy and free markets as though the two were synonymous because our "democracy" is a "free market" where a moneyed elite is in control, not the people.

However, democracy is not dead. There may be a way to revive the ancient democratic spirit and breathe new life into the old idea of rule of the people. We can start playing democratic games. Any number can play. If a group is large enough it can select a facilitator and a secretary by lot each and every time it meets. There's no reason we can't play participatory democracy just as the Athenians did, as a game of chance, and if it's fun it might spread spontaneously. Does anyone want to play?

Building Community, Taking Risks

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"Merchants of Death," and said that he regards the first Gulf War, the 12 years of sanctions and the current occupation as genocidal acts against the people of Iraq.

The discussion focused on what a concerned citizen should do. Lobbying political representatives was regarded by some as futile. One proposal was to seek massive, non-violent non-cooperation, Gandhi-style. Non-payment of taxes was suggested. Creating an alternative economy not based on consumerism, simplifying our lives, sharing resources and creating barter systems were all proposed. One person argued that a democratic society would not be possible until capitalism is completely replaced.

Maintaining hope, building strong bonds of community and a willingness to take risks were seen as key elements in making change.

Views of Patriarchy: In the Congo and In the U.S.

To Marie Rose Beya-Mukeni, a Congolese psychologist, many of the traditions of her country are precious and should be honored by all those who would help her people. But there is one tradition that she believes should be challenged: male domination.

In a Living Room Dialogue on women in the Congo in April, she outlined some of the struggles of women in her country. Traditionally they have not been permitted to talk in groups and are not encouraged to obtain higher education. Legally they are regarded as children. In some places women can still be killed for adultery while men are free to have sexual relations with many women.

Women don't feel entitled to say no to sex or demand that the man use a condom. At the same time men hold women responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS. There are now more deaths from AIDS than from malaria.

This situation is beginning to change, she said, and the key to improving women's lives and the lives of children is education. In terms of health, many women can't read a medical prescription or understand family planning. Given contraceptive pills, they ask their men to take them, believing that women don't need them and that it is up to men to decide how many children to have.

Women don't have the skills to obtain better-paying jobs and yet, with so many men being killed by war, they must provide income for their families alone, and the sex trade is often the only work they can find. Young women need other opportunities for income. Older men solicit sex from schoolgirls because they regard having sex with youth as a kind of therapy. As a result, many girls are becoming pregnant very young and the rate at which they are becoming infected with HIV is high and rising.

Men resist allowing women to become educated because they fear that the women will "take over." Consequently, educated women sometimes have a hard time socially. For example, many well-educated women accept becoming a third or fifth or wife in a polygamous marriage because it seems the only kind of marriage they can make.

Ms. Beya-Mukeni's description of the situation of women in her country gave rise to a discussion in the group about the workings of patriarchy in the U.S. The mother of a 17-year-old daughter expressed great concern about the ways youngsters are sexualized at a very early age here and about the images of women as sex objects conveyed by media outlets like MTV and by advertising. She proposed that people should go into schools and educate boys about the difference between pornography and a loving sexual relationship.

Another woman said she felt that men in general need opportunities to learn about emotional intelligence. A third portrayed her son as a gentle and caring stay-at-home dad whose wife became bitter and resentful at the stresses of trying to be a breadwinner and mother at the same time. She argued that the organization of paid employment must become more flexible to allow parents to share the responsibilities of jobs and childcare more equitably.

Marie Rose's 13-year old daughter Therese contributed her experiences of growing up in Kinshasa and of immigrating to this country. Her talk made clear that she will surely grow up to be a well-educated, courageous and compassionate woman like her mother.



“What I like about the newsletter is that it is a note of optimism in a world with a lot of negativism.”—Marian Martini Machera

How do you practice it?

What does democracy mean to you?

Let us hear from you!

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