

Council Meeting of the Socialist International
Geneva, 23-24 November 1989

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Today we want to look not only at the practical details of our future work, but, as our President suggested in Stockholm, at wider perspectives, emphases and priorities for our activities in the coming years.

Our membership is expanding and the Socialist International has an ever-higher profile in many regions of the world, with great hopes being invested in democratic socialism at this time of dynamic change.

In the coming years we will have to respond to the challenge of such expectations, not only with vision, but also with effective organisation and clear priorities.

Since our congress in Geneva in 1976, our achievements have been considerable, and the Socialist International is today well placed to continue building on those achievements.

This morning we have discussed developments in Eastern Europe, the re-emergence of democratic socialism and new opportunities for Europe as a whole.

We shall have to consider the most appropriate and effective ways of responding to this rapidly evolving situation where the Socialist International is well placed to play a constructive and important role. For example, sharing of information and exchange of experiences between our member parties and keeping open both formal and informal mechanisms for coordinating our political attitudes, as was the case at the recent gathering of European socialist leaders in Milan. I know that some further concrete initiatives in this direction will be taken in the course of this meeting.

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Whilst the efforts of the Socialist International to bring about substantial agreements on disarmament, both nuclear and conventional, and the peaceful solution of regional conflicts must be seen in a new and more positive context, the securing of peace will continue to be in the forefront of our work.

There will be new areas of activity for the Socialist International Disarmament Advisory Council in the years to come, in which we should also count on the contribution of an expanding membership of this body.

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The Congress in Stockholm, when discussing economic cooperation, reiterated the continuing need for a shift in North-South relations. The SI has repeatedly stressed the urgency and the consistent lack of progress in this direction. The Socialist International Committee on Economic Policy has reached a wide public with our views and analysis of the world economy, involving in our discussions an increasing number of institutions, organisations and experts from both North and South. We must ensure that the impetus of this work is not lost. Our Committee on Economic Policy, which is open to all members of the Socialist International, should be asked to continue and reintensify its efforts, especially in view of the new opportunities presented by an international climate more favourable to disarmament.

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The Socialist International Committees on Human Rights and on the Environment, both presented to the Stockholm Congress major policy reports, which will be the basis and inspiration for our work in the coming years. Both areas are central and vital to our principles and concerns. The work of these two committees will now need to assume a different character, concentrating for example on specific topical issues and problems, and on developing a capacity for urgent response, and I would further suggest that the Chairs of both Committees could now assume the active roles of spokespersons of the Socialist International on these two very fundamental areas.

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In Latin America and the Caribbean, the struggle over many years for democracy and the defence of human rights has borne fruit. Dictatorships have had to give way to democracy, and in a number of countries SI member parties are in government. The work often begun in opposition and clandestinity has led to the definite establishment of democratic socialism in the region. The election in December of a democratic government in Chile, after more than 16 years of military dictatorship, will embody the closing of a chapter.

In the common work of our member parties in the SI Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean, there are many crucial issues and challenges to be tackled. The SI has dedicated itself over a number of years to contributing to efforts for a peaceful solution in Central America. Nevertheless, new developments and the critical situation in El Salvador indicate that much is still to be done in that area; and the contribution of the Socialist International will continue to be of importance.

The new democracies in Latin America have to face enormous difficulties and challenges. One which has already been of crucial concern in recent year is the debt problem. Another growing threat to democracy in Latin America, which also has far-reaching effects elsewhere in the world, is drug trafficking. We think of its repercussions in Colombia, and also in countries where SI member parties are in government: Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. This and other issues will certainly continue to demand the development of the platform and actions of democratic socialism, through the work of our member parties in the region. The work of our Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean will thus become even more important and influential. This is reflected in the growing SI membership in the region and the interest of other parties and political forces in increased dialogue and exchanges.

Happily, we can now say that the SI Committees for Chile and for Paraguay, established as they were specifically to support the struggle for the restoration of democracy, no longer need to be active in that capacity. The SI should however continue to monitor the process of transition to democracy in both countries. In the case of Paraguay, where the process of transition is expected to be completed by 1992, the Chair of the Committee could continue to follow closely developments in that country and report as necessary to the Council.

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A challenge for the coming period will be, as our President pointed out in Stockholm, the SI's response to the strong voices of growing progressive movements in Asia. The Socialist International must be open to increasing and consolidating contacts and involvement in that part of the world, where great numbers of the world's population live, and whose economic development is becoming influential far beyond the region.

The Socialist International has a number of member parties in the region. Prospects for some long-standing members are becoming hopeful. Meanwhile, other strong and important parties have recently become members. A wider range of contacts with other significant and developing progressive forces in Asia should also be a priority.

Mobilisation around issues of human rights and democracy unites progressive forces active in the region. We need think only of the situation in Malaysia, where the SI has a member party, of Burma, Cambodia, the Philippines, or Korea.

At the same time, new possibilities for the solution of long-standing conflicts in the region are opening up, to which the SI can make a contribution.

In the coming period, we might think of sending missions to the region, the holding of a special SI conference in Asia; and I should also mention here that we have received an invitation, from our two member parties in Japan, to hold a future SI meeting there.

Furthermore, we should consider, with our comrades in the Asia Pacific Socialist Organisation, APSO, how we could assist in the intensification of their activities.

I should like to suggest here that one of the themes at the next Council meeting could be the development of activities and of a democratic socialist strategy in Asia.

We should also draw on the experience of our two member parties, both in government, in Australia and New Zealand, and on the contacts and joint initiatives which they have been developing with the many progressive forces in the Pacific area.

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The work of the SI in Africa has built up strong links between our member parties and important political forces in that continent. Certainly this has been the case with the cooperation of the SI, through its Southern Africa Committee, with the governing parties of the Front Line States and with the liberation movements of Southern Africa.

One important step forward is the new stage reached in Namibia, following the successful holding of free and fair elections, on the road to full independence. A free, independent and democratic Namibia is now a realistic goal. Meanwhile, despite changes in the situation in South Africa, the struggle against Apartheid and oppression will be the continuing and renewed priority of our Southern Africa Committee, whose work will remain a priority.

The cooperation between the Socialist International, the Socialist Group of the European Parliament, the Front Line States and Liberation Movements, resulting in our meetings in Arusha, 1984, and in Harare earlier this year, can also be pursued through further such joint initiatives.

In Stockholm, we reaffirmed the need for the continuing existence of a Study Group on Africa and the Congress agreed that the leader of the Portuguese Socialist Party and the International Secretary of the Socialist Party of Senegal should jointly undertake to give new impetus to the work of the Group. In recent years, new contacts have been established with progressive political forces. The Study Group should further develop the joint efforts of our member parties and of all progressive

forces for democracy, in defence of human rights, and in pursuit of solutions to conflicts in the continent.

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In the context of our commitment to work for the peaceful solution of regional conflicts, the Socialist International has continued, with renewed emphasis, through the work of our Middle East Committee, to make a positive contribution to the search for a peaceful solution to the Middle East problem. Along with the contribution of our 3 longstanding member parties in the region, the Committee has expanded contact and dialogue with other political forces and organisations in the area, and can also now count on the input of our new member parties from the Arab world.

As reflected in our Congress resolution in Stockholm, the SI is committed to continuing our work in the Middle East, and our Committee will also touch upon new areas - as indeed it has already begun to do, by discussing for the first time, at its meeting here in Geneva yesterday, the situation in Afghanistan.

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During the last inter-Congress period, the Study Group on the Mediterranean, established to consider specific questions of concern to the area, put forward a proposal for the organisation of a special SI Conference on the Mediterranean area, there have so far emerged two specific issues of common concern which should be included in the agenda of such a conference. Firstly, the question of developing closer economic cooperation between the European and North African countries bordering the Mediterranean and secondly the question of common environmental problems in the Mediterranean region. Whilst the work of the study group will continue in the coming period, the realisation of this proposed special Conference should also be a priority for the near future.

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It has been suggested by the French Socialist Party that the Socialist International should also extend its work to an important area of democratic political life in all our countries which has not previously been a focus of our exchanges: that of elected local authorities. One of our Vice-Presidents could be directly responsible taking up this matter and for considering the most appropriate forum for such work.

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Suggestions have come from a number of member parties, that the SI Finance and Administration Committee would benefit from increased direct involvement of those responsible for financial questions in member parties in the discussion of financial matters, whilst politico-organisational questions such as applications for membership should be discussed separately. This seems to me a suggestion worth considering.

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Alongside our role in promoting cooperation between our members, the SI should also continue to give importance to cooperation with other international organisations.

I should mention first that we look forward to reinforcing our close cooperation and exchange with our fraternal organisations, Socialist International Women and the International Union of Socialist Youth. There will be many areas in which to continue our collaboration. We should not forget also the International Falcon Movement.

We have a long tradition of cooperation with the ICFTU, and an important initiative was the holding early this year of a joint conference on Central America. This event also highlighted other areas of common interest where our two organisations could work together in the future.

The SI also has a long tradition of commitment to the important role of the United Nations. We should take the opportunity to closely associate the Socialist International with the opportunities for increased multilateral cooperation arising from the newly positive international climate and revitalisation of support for the UN.

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The last congress, with the adoption of our new Declaration of Principles, our Platform on Human Rights, Environment Report, and other policy documents, provided us with sound and inspiring points of reference for our future activities and gave a new impetus to our task. Against this background, the structures of our organisation, our committees and study groups, assume renewed significance as instruments for carrying forward our ideas.
