

RACIAL INTOLERANCE IN THE
CZECH REPUBLIC

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 22, 1998

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my profound alarm at the future deterioration of the situation for minorities in the Czech Republic. Since the Velvet Revolution, that country has witnessed violent and sometimes deadly attacks against minorities—a pattern of violence which is not being addressed by the Czech Government.

Let me describe the most recent examples of this unchecked wave of brutality. On May 7, an Algerian in a Prague subway station was stabbed by skinheads; the next day, two Indians were also attacked by skinheads in a subway station in Prague. On the night of May 16–17, a Rom was beaten by skinheads and left on a road, where he was subsequently hit and killed by a truck. And last week, local officials in two different Czech cities—Pilsen and Usti nad Labem—announced plans to build ghettos. In Usti nad Labem, authorities stated outright that they plan to build a 15-foot-high wall around Roma apartment buildings. Pilsen officials described their walled-off area as a place for putting “undesirables,” using terminology reminiscent of that used by the Nazis. Former Czech Minister of Interior Jan Ruml has described these plans as “inadmissible in a democratic society.”

Unfortunately, these were not isolated events. Last November, Sudanese student Hassan Elamin Aldelradi was killed by a skinhead in Prague. In January, a Romani woman was seriously injured in Krnov when her home was fire bombed. In February, another Romani woman, Helena Bihariova was attacked, beaten, forced into the Elbe River and drowned. In early March, two Romani men in Decin were assaulted by a man with a pistol; a Congolese doctor was subsequently beaten in the town of Prostejov. In late March, skinheads in Trutnov attacked a Jewish couple. Each and every one of these has been widely described as a racially motivated attack.

Apparently, skinheads are not convinced they will be held accountable for their acts and the Czech Government has failed to persuade Roma that authorities will do all in their power to protect them. Roma have increasingly shown their unwillingness to simply stand aside while their family members are attacked or murdered, one by one. A number of recent attacks against Roma have been followed by revenge attacks by Roma. The rule of law appears to be degenerating into the rule of the mob. Official statements like that made March 17 by the current Minister of Interior, Cyril Svoboda, exacerbate the charged atmosphere. Mr. Svoboda minimized the significance of racially motivated violence, claimed it is not destabilizing and then blamed non-governmental organizations for distorting the Czech Republic's image through their reporting on this problem.

The most recent revenge attack by Roma occurred in the town of Novy Bor two weeks ago, when two Roma attacked Miroslav Sladek, a member of parliament campaigning for re-election. Sladek is the notorious head of the Czech “Republican Party” who has called for making one's ethnic identity as a Rom a criminal act.

A fair amount of media attention has been given to the fact that the two Roma arrested in that case were immediately pardoned by President Havel. Understandably, President Havel's decision has been controversial. What I think is most interesting is his reasoning: according to the President's spokesperson, the President did not believe that the local police could conduct an impartial investigation into the matter. She noted, in particular, that the police have given an account of events which match that of Mr. Sladek's, but which is contradicted by other eyewitnesses. She also observed that human rights groups have reported a consistent failure of the police in that area to investigate and prosecute successfully racially motivated attacks against Roma.

On May 14, the Czech Chamber of Deputies weighed in on this serious matter and expressed concern about the attack on Sladek. They even called for the Ministry of Interior to investigate the attack further to determine if it was a planned attack. Certainly, violence should not have been used against Sladek. As repugnant and disgusting as Sladek's views might be, he is entitled to them. What I do not understand is why the Czech Chamber of Deputies—which has remained silent when Roma have been attacked and even murdered—has chosen to express its concern in this manner. The bulk of the Czech cabinet has remained conspicuously silent regarding the most recent racially motivated skinhead attacks; certainly, the Prime Minister appears to have said nothing. Instead, Monika Horakova, a Romani representative on the recently created Inter-Ministerial Commission for Romani Affairs, has been dispatched to dissuade Roma from taking matters into their own hands. In the end, however, Ms. Horakova is unlikely to be successful unless she has the full backing of the full cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, the Czech Government should not wait until after the June elections to reach to racially motivated violence. With time, more innocent life could be lost. Every member of the Cabinet should condemn in decisive terms the acts of these repugnant skinheads; the Ministry of Interior, in particular, should unequivocally signal its commitment to ensure that the perpetrators of these acts are caught, prosecuted and convicted. And the discriminatory Czech citizenship law, which continues to telegraph the message that Roma are not wanted in that country, must be amended.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

HON. CONSTANCE A. MORELLA

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 22, 1998

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, what have we done to childhood? We live in a world where every year, 1 million teen become pregnant, 3 million teen contract STDs, and HIV/AIDS is spreading most rapidly among adolescents.

What will it take to convince teenagers—the “it-will-never-happen-to-me crowd”—that they can become pregnant and infected with STDs, including HIV infection?

What will it take to convince community leaders, religious leaders, local and national leaders, pop culture stars, and parents that education and prevention strategies are critical?

I am proud to join my colleague, EVA CLAYTON, with whom I have organized this special order, and other members of the Women's Caucus to shed light on the problem of teen pregnancy during National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month. Although we have been fighting this problem for a long time and the problem seems insurmountable, I am energized and encouraged by recent trends and the efforts of so many outstanding organizations to combat teen pregnancy.

I am proud to be a member of the Congressional Advisory Panel to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and so many other groups have moved our Nation's consciousness about teen pregnancy to a higher level, and we are seeing results. The teenage birth rate has declined steadily since 1991 when the rate was 6.2 percent, an overall decline of 12 percent.

Although it is encouraging that the teen birth rate is declining, we must celebrate cautiously. Out-of-wedlock births are increasing, and over 1 million teens become pregnant every year.

Seventy-Five percent of teen births are out of wedlock today. In 1960: 15 percent of teen births were out of wedlock. Today, teen mothers make up the largest group of all first births to unmarried women (48 percent). About 44 percent of all girls become pregnant at least once before age 20—more than one million girls per year—most of whom are unmarried and totally unprepared to take on the responsibilities of parenthood. One-third of these pregnancies end in abortion, and only 2 percent of teens who give birth choose to put their babies up for adoption.

We know the consequences of teen pregnancy. Teen parents are much more likely to be trapped in a cycle of poverty. The opportunities lost to teens who become pregnant are enormous, and costs associated with teenage pregnancy drain limited federal, state, local and family resources.

I want to highlight an important point about teen pregnancy: It is not enough to say we want to solve the problem of teen pregnancy; we must know how to fix it. We cannot solve the problem without sufficient information on what works in teen pregnancy prevention, and what works in different areas of the country. I commend my colleagues Nita Lowey and Mike Castle for their legislation, H.R. 1736, the Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Act of 1997, which will ensure that we have better information and provide for in-depth evaluation of teen pregnancy prevention programs.

Today's message is a call to action. Although we don't have all the answers to solve the problem; it's clear that we simply cannot wait.

As Members of Congress, we must do more. If figuring out what works, we must look at why teenage girls become pregnant.

What is it about our society that makes teenage girls think that to be loved, they must have a child of their own? Surely we can do better. Educational opportunities build self-esteem, as do girls' sports and community activities. Improving our education system, increasing access to girls' sports, building our communities, increasing job opportunities and giving young girls something to look forward to will all reduce teen pregnancy, and those are all areas where our decisions make a difference.

We also have jurisdiction over federal programs that deal with teenage pregnancy: the

Title X Family Planning Program, grants from the Centers for Disease Control for community projects, and the Adolescent and Family Life Act which provides a small grant that goes toward care and parenting for adolescent mothers and abstinence only education. These programs help, but they are clearly not enough.

Although federal attention and involvement is important, we must become local leaders on this issue. Teen pregnancy is a national problem, but its solutions are local. We must go into our districts to see what works and encourage community involvement.

There is not magic bullet. I have worked with Congresswoman EVA CLAYTON on this issue, and I can tell you that what works in her district in North Carolina is not what works in Montgomery County, Maryland.

I have met with Elayne Bennett, founder of the Best Friends program, and several of her students. I must be honest; I was very skeptical of abstinence-only prevention efforts. Her results in my district, however, have been amazing. The Best Friends program is not a quick fix. It works because mentors make a long-term investment in junior high and high school girls, taking them on outings, teaching them new skills, and going to weekly classes with them. It won't work for everyone, but it is one of many approaches making a dent in this critical problem.

Maryland's teen pregnancy rate ranks 13th nationally. There are 118 pregnancies annually per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in Maryland; 43% result in live births and 29% result in abortions. The State of Maryland is making progress in reducing the number of pregnant teenagers through the Governor's Council on Adolescent Pregnancy. As part of their ongoing media campaign, they have developed a new series of ads focusing on parent-child communication as a means to prevent teen pregnancy, and they are holding a contest for teens to create teen pregnancy prevention slogans.

I will continue to encourage my colleagues in Congress to make reducing teen pregnancy a priority by going back to their districts and encouraging community leaders, religious leaders, parents, business, the media, and local leaders to figure out what works. This is only the beginning of a dialogue between the Congress, the media, policy experts, state and local governments, and educators. It's time that we figure out what works in order to make a difference.

NATIONAL MARITIME DAY 1998

HON. LANE EVANS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 22, 1998

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, on this special day, National Maritime Day, it is fitting that we recognize and honor those men and women who have served our country by transporting our Nation's cargoes in times of peace and prosperity and in times of war and grave danger. The service of merchant mariners to our Nation includes the heroic effort put forth during World War II by the thousands of young men who volunteered for service in the United States Merchant Marine. Many of these merchant mariners were recruited specifically to staff ships under the control and direction of

the United States government to assist the World War II effort. These seamen were subject to government control, their vessels were controlled by the government under the authority of the War Shipping Administration and, like branches of military service, they traveled under sealed orders and were subject to the Code of Military Justice.

Some volunteers joined the Merchant Marines because minor physical problems, such as poor eyesight, made them ineligible for service in the Army, Navy, or Marine Corps. Others were encouraged by military recruiters to volunteer for service in the Merchant Marines because the recruiter recognized that the special skills offered by the volunteer could best be put to use for our country by service in the Merchant Marines. Most importantly, all were motivated by their deep love of country and personal sense of patriotism to contribute to the war effort.

In order to staff our growing merchant fleet during World War II, the U.S. Marine Commission established training camps around the country under the direct supervision of the Coast Guard. After completing basic training, which included both small arms and cannon proficiency, seamen became active members of the U.S. Merchant Marine. These seamen, often at great personal risk, helped deliver troops and war supplies needed for every Allied invasion site from Guadalcanal to Omaha Beach.

More than 6,500 merchant mariners who served our country during World War II gave the ultimate sacrifice of their lives, including 37 who died as prisoners of war, and almost 5,000 World War II Merchant Mariners remain officially missing and are presumed dead. In addition, 733 U.S. Merchant ships were destroyed. Even after the surrender of Japan, members of our Merchant Marine fleet were in mortal danger as they continued to support the war effort by entering mined harbors to transport our troops safely home. After the war ended, they carried food and medicine to millions of the world's starving people.

In spite of the illustrious service of the World War II merchant mariners, then-Secretary of the Air Force, Edward Aldridge, inexplicably made the decision in 1988 to define the dates for World War II service differently for merchant mariners than for those who served in the other American forces. The effect of this decision was to deny veteran status to those merchant mariners who served between the dates of August 15, 1945 and December 31, 1946, the official end of World War II. H.R. 1126, the Merchant Mariner Fairness Act, which has wide bipartisan support from over one-half of the Members of the House, will correct this erroneous administrative decision by making the service eligibility period for World War II merchant mariners identical to that established for others.

It is important to remember that during the time period addressed by this bill, August 15, 1945 through December 31, 1946, 12 U.S. Flag Merchant Vessels were lost or damaged as a result of striking mines, and some of the merchant mariners serving on these vessels were killed or injured. Fully understanding the tremendous risks they faced, merchant mariners, nonetheless, willingly went into mined harbors so that they could bring our American troops home to their families and friends. I believe these courageous merchant mariners, who were subject to the risk and dangers of

war between V-J Day and the official end of the war, have been wrongfully denied veteran status. They faced the very real hazards of war-time hostile actions and should not be denied the status of veteran for purposes of laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs because their sea-going contributions began after August 15, 1945. H.R. 1126 will correct this injustice.

It has been more than a half century since the end of World War II. How much longer must these aging merchant mariners, who are forgotten patriots of World War II, wait for their service to our Nation to be properly and fully honored and acknowledged? H.R. 1126 will finally provide appropriate recognition: veteran status for a few thousand World War II American merchant mariners. While this status will enable them to be eligible for veterans' benefits, it is likely that the only benefit most will receive is proper recognition of their contribution to the war effort and the right to a veteran's funeral. The merchant mariners who would be granted veteran status by this bill are aging. They will not qualify for educational benefits. As Medicare beneficiaries, most already have longstanding relationship with their medical providers and are unlikely to seek VA health care. Nonetheless, the merchant mariners of World War II will receive the long-overdue thanks from the Nation they served faithfully and courageously.

I encourage those Members who have not already cosponsored the Merchant Mariners Fairness Act to celebrate National Maritime Day by joining Members on both sides of the aisle as a cosponsor of this important legislation.

TRIBUTE TO DR. ARTHUR J.
NAPARSTEK

HON. MARCY KAPTUR

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 22, 1998

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the outstanding career of a distinguished scholar and civic activist, Dr. Arthur J. Naparstek. On Saturday, May 30, 1998, Dr. Naparstek will be joined by his family and friends to celebrate his 60th birthday. It gives me great pleasure to wish my dear friend, Arthur, a very happy birthday.

Dr. Arthur J. Naparstek is a nationally recognized authority and leading theorist on community change and community organization. Since 1962 he has been extremely dedicated to improving the lives of those less fortunate by teaching others how to develop neighborhood strategies and coalitions to build stronger communities.

Since 1983, Dr. Naparstek has been the Coyle Professor of Social Work at the School for Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland where he served as Dean for nearly a decade. As Director of the Cleveland Foundation Commission on Poverty from 1990 to 1993, Dr. Naparstek initiated the drafting of the commission's report which served as the basis for HUD's \$2.6 billion Urban Revitalization Demonstration Act (HOPE VI). In July 1994, in recognition of his service to combat inner city poverty, President Clinton appointed Dr. Naparstek to the Board of Trustees of the Corporation for National