

The O'Dell case and LaRouche's exoneration

by Marianna Wertz

Joseph Roger O'Dell III was executed in Virginia on July 23. O'Dell went to prison a "lost soul," who had spent much of his life in crime. But the fight he waged to reform himself and to prove his innocence in the murder for which he was executed, has sparked the largest international protest against America's use of the death penalty in recent years. Indeed, Joseph O'Dell has already been redeemed by this fight.

Just before he died, O'Dell married Lori Urs, a close friend who had fought for his legal rights. His last words were, "This is the happiest day of my life because I married my wife." Then, addressing Virginia Gov. George Allen, who refused him clemency, O'Dell said, "You are killing an innocent man. I hope you'll preserve the evidence for future testing." The chance to prove his innocence through a second DNA test on various samples found on the body of the murder victim, was denied all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The first DNA test, conducted after the 1985 murder, was inconclusive, but DNA experts testified that now, modern technologies would give conclusive results. Attorneys in the case have now moved to preserve the evidence, which could exonerate O'Dell.

The leading edge of the international protest was centered in Italy, where the death penalty is considered barbaric, and the idea of executing an innocent man is seen as the height of barbarism. More than 10,000 appeals for clemency poured in to Governor Allen in the days before the execution, two-thirds of them from Italy. Pope John Paul II appealed personally to President Clinton to halt the execution. Prime Minister Romano Prodi appealed repeatedly to Governor Allen and to the U.S. Supreme Court. Hundreds of Italian parliamentarians called for clemency for O'Dell, many visiting Governor Allen personally to make their appeal.

LaRouche movement intervenes

The international movement associated with Lyndon LaRouche launched a major intervention in the case, and is now helping lead the fight to ensure that O'Dell did not die in vain—that his death leads to a cleaning out of the barbaric elements in the U.S. justice system.

On July 18, Lyndon LaRouche penned a letter to the editor of the *Arlington [Va.] Catholic Herald*, which covers the diocese in which Associate Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, a professed Roman Catholic, resides. Scalia, who vociferously supports the death penalty, cast the deciding vote

in the 5-4 decision against O'Dell's appeal. In his letter, LaRouche wrote, "The purpose of my letter is to call on St. Catherine's Roman Catholic Church, of which Justice Scalia is a member, to repudiate his actions as a Supreme Court Justice, from the pulpit. As long as his philosophy is given credence by leaders of the church, it will mislead faithful Catholics that it is somehow coherent with their faith. . . ."

"If we forget the Christian appreciation of Genesis 1:26-28, we join the Social Darwinists in that return to paganism, in whose arena there is no moral distinction between man and the beasts, while the mob, acting with Scalia's endorsement, delivers the verdict, thumbs up, or down. If we repudiate agapē in matters of justice, as Scalia does, then, as the beloved I Corinthians 13 warns, we are as nothing."

On July 21, the Schiller Institute contacted Mother Teresa in Calcutta, asking her to make an appeal in the case. She released a moving call to Allen and Scalia, saying, "I come before you today to appeal for the life of a man—Joseph Roger O'Dell. I do not know what he has done to be condemned to death. All I know is that he, too, is a child of God, created for greater things—to love and to be loved. I pray that Joseph is at peace with God; that he has said sorry to God and to whomever he has hurt. Let us not take away his life. Let us bring hope into his life and into all our lives." Her appeal was read to O'Dell before he was killed.

On July 23, the evening of the execution, the Schiller Institute held a candlelight vigil outside the U.S. Supreme Court. Lyndon LaRouche's letter was read and the audiotape of Mother Teresa's statement was played.

On July 28, Helga Zepp LaRouche, founder of the Schiller Institute, released an Open Letter to the Nation of Italy, urging that the mobilization against the killing of O'Dell be turned into a fight to end the corruption in the U.S. judicial system, by taking up the case for the exoneration of Lyndon LaRouche. "To those determined to have no more Joseph O'Dells, I urge you: Take what [former U.S. Attorney General] Ramsey Clark has identified as the worst case of the U.S. Justice Department, and overturn it, by demanding that President Clinton exonerate Lyndon LaRouche. Only in this way, will the barbarians in the Department of Justice, and Supreme Court Justices like Antonin Scalia, who believe in mob rule, be ousted."

On July 29, at the request of O'Dell's widow, Lori Urs O'Dell, the Schiller Institute organized a vigil at the Norfolk International Airport, as O'Dell's body was being placed on the plane that would carry him to his final resting place in Palermo, Italy, which has determined to make his gravesite a monument against the death penalty. At the vigil, which was led by Father Tom Carraluzzi, an Episcopal Vicar in the Richmond Roman Catholic Diocese, Nina Ogden of the Schiller Institute read Zepp LaRouche's Open Letter to the Nation of Italy, pledging that O'Dell's death would not be in vain. Mrs. O'Dell vowed to continue to fight until the death penalty was ended in the United States.