

AFTER CHERNOBYL: Peace, rights and freedom

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When we gathered earlier this year to commemorate those who perished in the first nuclear explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we were compelled to add the name of Chernobyl to our deliberations. Chernobyl was not a deliberate act of policy, but an accident. As an accident, it was much less serious than it might have been, and certainly less serious than it would have been, were it not for the supreme courage of those Soviet firemen who prevented the spread of conflagration from one reactor to the others at the cost of their own lives. Despite great organisational efforts, the after-effects of this disaster will endure, and remove from circulation lands and amenities which have been polluted to more lethal effect than the territories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Humankind is deeply worried by the warnings we have received from Chernobyl, no less than by the terrible warnings which were detonated in the Japanese skies in the first half of August 1945.

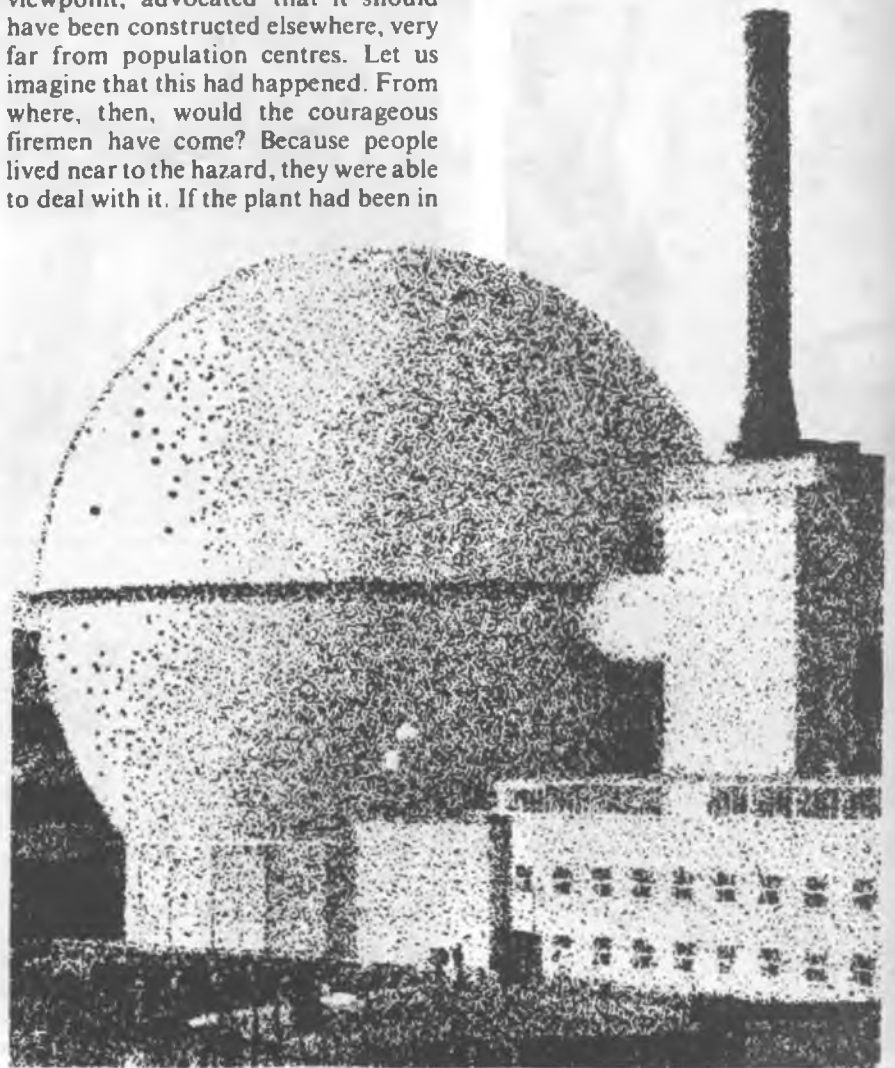
As Mr. Gorbachev told us during his broadcast after the Chernobyl events, we have been given a reminder of the awful finality of nuclear war.

Bertrand Russell used to claim that human beings could seek protection from adversity in one of two ways: there was the East Asian method of the Chinese who fought the floods by building dykes along the Yellow River: and there was the West Asian method of Noah, who "thought that the best protection was a virtuous life". Gradually, the Chinese point of view has come to prevail, and people

are more and more concerned to tackle their problems by relevant action, informed by thought. Nonetheless, Russell was not wrong to conclude that "a virtuous life is as necessary to survival as dykes".

The Chernobyl plant was built close to major centres of population. Many ecologists, following the "Chinese" viewpoint, advocated that it should have been constructed elsewhere, very far from population centres. Let us imagine that this had happened. From where, then, would the courageous firemen have come? Because people lived near to the hazard, they were able to deal with it. If the plant had been in

the frozen north, hours away from the necessary human intervention, then the disaster could have been many hundreds of times worse. This is no strong argument for building all new reactors close to population centres. Instead, it should persuade us that Noah was not wrong to seek his answer in a virtuous life. Rational



anticipation of danger will only help so far: beyond that point, the choices are of a different kind. The choice about nuclear energy is not one of where best to locate its perils, but of whether they should be unleashed at all.

Almost no-one argues in favour of unleashing nuclear war. By now, the empirical scientists have persuaded nearly everyone of the truth of the hypothesis of "nuclear winter". A very small exchange of nuclear weapons offers the risk of fundamental climatic change, which could eliminate the species, never mind the people who survived the blast and fallout of the next major war. That small handful of zealots who still put their trust in war have offered us a slogan, old but still heard in some places. "Better dead than red", they say. In Russell's time, an effort was made to invert this slogan and foist it on the peace movement. Attempts were made to typecast Russell as the spokesperson of "better red than dead". He refused this role. First, he pointed out that the death involved in previous wars had claimed its victims from combatant generations. But death in the next war would prevail over all posterity. It might be thought noble for a man to lay down his life in protection of his children, or the way of life of his children's descendants: it could not be so considered for a man to lay down the lives of his children's children, and their ultimate descendants. Since a fullstop to human evolution cancels the possibility of victory for anyone, argued Russell, "it follows logically that a negotiated detente cannot be based on the complete subjection of either side to the other, but must preserve the existing balance while transforming it from a balance of terror to a balance of hope. That is to say, co-existence must be accepted genuinely and not superficially as a necessary condition of human survival".

How far, then, does co-existence imply the acceptance of injustice? Is it possible to found survival on morally acceptable principles? This is the question which has aroused considerable attention in the revived anti-nuclear movement of the 1980s. Of course, different sections of this vast movement give different answers:

and indeed many individuals are not sure, themselves, how to answer. The issues are complex. Peace is more, we are often told, than an absence of war. But justice is also more than conformity with old rules, and people's expectations are constantly changing.

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A classic problem of this kind emerged when, on 13 December 1985, an international congress of intellectuals met in Warsaw at the invitation of the Polish authorities. The agenda was to consider the problems of peace and disarmament. A variety of Polish oppositional organisations addressed an appeal to those visiting their country: it carried the title, *Peace and Freedom are Inseparable*.

The Polish opposition stated a number of justifiable complaints. The independent trade union movement, Solidarnosc, with ten million members, had been outlawed, and many of its leaders detained. Numerous independent social organisations had been disbanded at the same time. Despite efficient and rigorous repression, however, such organisations continue to operate in Poland clandestinely. So the statement of the oppositionists proclaims "You have come to a country where there is no peace".

In the same way, there is certainly no peace in South Africa. Central America knows no peace. There is no peace in Afghanistan, Kampuchea, Eritrea, or any of the other zones of conflict and civil war. While no-one thinks such wars should be fought with nuclear weapons, there always remains a risk that they could spill over to embroil nuclear powers, and thus "escalate". Injustice, wherever it is found, invites resistance and retaliation. Few among those living in happier circumstances would withhold their sympathy from such rebellion, even though it is overhung

by Hiroshima, the shadow of which never leaves us.

The Polish authorities might be genuinely distressed to figure on such a list of oppressions as this. They did not choose their geographical location and would doubtless insist that their effort to promote discussions on peace were part of a more sustained effort to improve detente, and thus establish a more secure space for independent action. Indeed, it is entirely arguable that Poland's continuing present crisis resulted directly from the efforts of previous Polish Governments to secure greater freedom of action within the Soviet sphere of influence. Why, other than to buy a degree of economic independence, should Polish ministers have borrowed so indiscriminately from Western banks? After the world oil crisis, such banks were desperate to lend to governments, and particularly to communist governments, which were thought to be among the safest potential recipients of funds. This was a miscalculation on both sides. Solidarnosc itself emerged in those Polish ports which experienced most directly the resultant trauma. In a desperate attempt to meet spiralling inflation in interest repayments, more and more frenzied efforts were made to export anything that would sell. Polish port workers found themselves cramming every ounce of meat into export-bound holds, while their wives would queue for hours for a tiny piece of sausage. Poland most assuredly undergoes a crisis of national independence, and there are extremely serious problems in her relationships with the Soviet Union. But those are not the only problems she faces. It was not the banks which banned Solidarnosc, even if they did precipitate the social crisis in which it was born. Those of us who are trade unionists, operating with greater or lesser degrees of freedom outside Poland, will all deplore the suppression of Poland's independent unions, and want to express our sympathy and support for their political prisoners. It is not surprising that the decision to outlaw the trade union has deepened the crisis in which the Polish government operates. No doubt, among the ten million people

who had organised themselves in Solidarnosc, there will be sufficient numbers of active spirits to continue their agitation. The more that such agitation brings down further repression, the truer it will be to say that there is "no peace". Even in countries where repression has been more effective, like Czechoslovakia, injustice and intolerance invite criticism and opposition. No-one should be reconciled to cynical usurpation. Does this mean, then, that there can be no co-existence?

Surely not. The struggles of Polish workers are in no way undermined by the existence of relatively normal relations between Poland and other states. If there is a detente in progress, the foreign journalists will be present in Poland, while Polish journalists are also stationed overseas. The more freedom such journalists experience, the more information will be spread about the state of opinion inside Polish factories. The more trade and cultural exchange there is, the more channels of effective communication there will be. Detente does not at all imply support for the Polish government in its relations with its own people, and still less does it imply endorsement of repression and tyranny. It is arguable that the most propitious conditions for tyranny are those of isolation. The less a country interacts with the wider outside world, the worse its leaders can behave. The more direct material benefits a government receives from international contact, the more reluctant it will be to put them in jeopardy. Of course, if tyrannies cross the bounds of civilised behaviour they may arouse moral revulsion which can produce the demand that they be ostracised. But here, we are dealing with a process. How difficult it is may be understood by looking at the case of South Africa where rules an institutional racism, under which an overwhelming majority of people suffers the most systematic denial not only of its human rights, but of humanity itself. Yet it has taken decades of agitation to begin to isolate this system from the rest of the world polity.

Moral ostracism does not fall from the sky. People have to be persuaded that certain governments

are insupportable, that their tyranny is inexcusable and that it is necessary to take steps to boycott it. Commonly, such persuasion not only takes a long time, but only comes about as a result of strenuous efforts and intensive organisation. Paradoxically, these are helped, throughout the interim, by "normal" contacts. Most authoritarian governments in the world are not complete tyrannies and are capable of movement in better or worse directions. If, in the absence of critical pressure, they are prone to lock people up, then, under such pressure, they may become more or less prone to let them out. Opposition to tyranny is a continuous process, a prolonged struggle.



In brighter days: Lech Walesa meets the press.

In the same way, the struggle for peace is a continuous process, as is the campaign for nuclear disarmament. It would be extremely convenient if all these good causes ran along parallel tracks to an ultimate and harmonious destination. That, however, is not our experience. Some of the countries with very good policies on nuclear disarmament have somewhat bad histories of disrespect for human rights. Other countries with relatively good records on human rights at home have appalling records about disarmament. Just as disarmament negotiations involve elements of chicanery, deceit and gamesmanship, so the international argument on human rights is neither disinterested,

nor is it always honestly conducted. There are many countries in which it is almost obligatory to disapprove of repression in Chile, but where the invasion of Czechoslovakia is always whitewashed. There are other countries in which the sufferings of Polish trade unions can be fully reported, but where such dreadful facts as the genocide in Timor are almost totally unknown and unreported. Selectivity in the news media is only part of the difficulty. Governments weigh in to deliberate effect. Thus, in the United States, after the debacle of Viet Nam, President Carter unleashed a major "human rights" offensive which had two edges.

First, it represented a reorientation of American policy within the US sphere of influence. From now on, American officials were to distance themselves from the bloodiest dictators in Latin America, and to give greater comfort to centrist political forces. Secondly, towards the Soviet bloc, criticism of breaches of civil rights were to become part of a more political style of negotiation, pressing home every propaganda advantage which could be derived from the political weaknesses of the adversary. However, human rights were a boomerang when they were used as a weapon in the conflict between superpowers. Spheres of influence may have been easier to manage in the days of the old empires,

when democratic expectations were minimal; but the rise of such expectations renders subject nations turbulent and the client governments unstable. The election of President Reagan gave a savage blow to the United States campaign for "human rights": but this strategy of President Carter was already plainly collapsing even before the fall of his administration. Noam Chomsky has given us a magisterial description of the way in which this policy was dissembled, and of its cynical evasion of responsibility for consequences it had been designed to produce.

The majority of members of governments are normally, most of the time, as concerned for the maintenance of peace as are peace movements themselves. But the methods of governmental action necessarily base themselves on what is often mis-called "realism". Governments build dykes. In flagrant contrast, the idealism of peace movements can sometimes be represented as "unrealistic". Bertrand Russell, for instance, was a convinced advocate of world government. This is a perfectly logical proposal, and one which would imply the development of frameworks in which a whole series of more or less interconnected problems might be solved in an orderly fashion.

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However, the majority of political leaders in the contemporary world still regards Russell's thinking on this matter as profoundly "unrealistic". This means that there is no single forum with the decisive power to determine the enforcement of human rights, or the level of international policing (and armament) that is consensually supportable. There are innumerable other problems which also lack solution in the absence of such a framework.

Among prime causes of conflict

and war, we may list a few: the inequality of economic development between north and south; the effects of intensive competition between developed countries; slump, and the aggravated increase of enforced idleness among relatively highly skilled populations in "advanced" countries, as well as among the poorest; ecological imbalances resulting from avaricious exploitation of nature; the recurrent reappearance of famine and social distress. Humankind is not without considered strategies to face these problems. In July 1986, for instance, the Socialist International, gathering in Lima, adopted a most far-sighted report entitled *Global Challenge* and pledged itself to joint action for its implementation. It remains to be seen whether socialist parties in the different countries are able to co-ordinate their activities on the relevant large scale. What is perfectly clear is that joint action between countries is all the more necessary in the absence of an accepted supranational authority.

Being "realists", perhaps this is as much as we can anticipate. But the human conscience is always unrealistic, and peace movements tend to see over the fences separating nations, to a wider world community. However, the lack of any global authority with power to act on all these issues simultaneously serves to do more than simply inhibit successful reform. It also separates the agencies of change, and compels the subdivision of the objective of change. Of course, we all truly live in one world. We all truly desire peace in the world, and freedom, and the prospects of satisfying personal development for each individual among our peoples. But to bring more than a hundred governments into line to secure even the smallest step towards disarmament requires a major campaigning effort. It is not easy to co-ordinate the efforts of thirty different peace movements, or trade unions. Since each of these organisation acts on its national plane, it evolves its overriding national priorities. Democracy, to the extent that it exists, operates at that national level and reinforces the partial view. National action is practical, step by step, "rational" and, of course, limited.

Peace and human rights, jobs and freedom, these abstract goods are threatened in a crisis which results directly from uncontrolled competition within a system of separate political authorities. To overcome this separation, and obtain the joint action which is necessary, we quickly learn that we must separate our issues, focussing all possible attention on the most precise pressure

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points. For peace, we do require disarmament and, above all, nuclear disarmament. It is easier to agitate against "the bomb" than it is to change the economic world, and remove the causes of slump, unemployment, and military competition. And yet all of us can perceive, and clearly, that the arms race correlates with economic crisis, and aggravates it all the time.

What, then, can we do? Separate national peace movements will not be able to evolve policies for the abolition of hunger and oppression, without taking on the duties of fully-fledged political parties. Usually they will find it easier to persuade existing political organisations to address such issues, than it would be to elbow aside all established organisations. For the foreseeable future, peace movements will still need to prioritise their chosen goals, and to maximise pressures to the best of their ability. All this argues for a further development of international contact and exchange, as one necessary counter to the problems of specialisation. And yet, there are other international pressures, which have already ensured that we have international organisations for human rights, international attempts at economic co-operation and a new international economic order, and international campaigns against hunger and poverty. Are we not arriving at the time when there needs to be some exchange between these separate initiatives? Is it premature to suggest that we should reach out towards one another, to knit together our efforts, not only to prevent the

world from destroying itself, but also to render it fit to live in?

World government may be a long haul, and a difficult one to achieve. But we do have already an organisation of United Nations, bringing together diplomats representing each separate state. The intermediate project which we need to match this dialogue of governments, is surely a United Peoples Organisation, in which all the peace movements and social organisations can begin to refine the linkages which can form world public opinion, and make it effective.

If the United Nations were to move towards a more integrated structure it would probably seek to establish two chambers for its deliberations: one consisting of governmental representatives, as at present; and the other consisting of persons chosen in a process of direct elections. Such proposals are seldom ventilated at the present time: although there are many people who would support them, and it cannot be doubted that they would help the development of relevant pressure groups. In the meantime, we



Chernobyl: Soviet firefighters giving up their lives

have to make do with a growing network of non-governmental organisations. Everything which enlarges the scope for international democratic action helps to knit the world together. But the struggle for peace with human rights remains most active at the national level, in separate national territories, albeit with varying

degrees of moral support from outside.

The most efficient globalism in the modern world has been established in completely non-democratic organisations. The giant transnational

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corporations extend their influence around the world, with cavalier disregard for the natural environment, and systematic indifference to humane social objectives. Frequently, they are directly involved in political pressures to neutralise democratic decisions, wherever these might threaten profitable operations. Prominent among such corporations are the largest military producers. When unaccountable power has obtained a near-universal scope, it is at great peril that the democratic process restricts itself to partial, blinkered, separate national development.

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