

4-1989

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## Recommended Citation

Loya, Joseph A. (1989) "A Report on the Sixteenth Christian and Marxist Dialogue on Peace, with Commentary on the Eastern European Participation," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 3.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol9/iss2/3>

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# **A REPORT ON THE SIXTEENTH CHRISTIAN AND MARXIST DIALOGUE ON PEACE, WITH COMMENTARY ON THE EASTERN EUROPEAN PARTICIPATION**

by **Joseph A. Loya, O.S.A.**

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Yugoslavia bears the terrible burdens of a twenty-one billion dollar debt to the West, a two hundred per cent inflation rate over the past twelve months, and one million workers unemployed. "It is a crushing fact that Yugoslavs today, forty-three years after peace in Europe and at the threshold of the twenty-first century, are queuing for black bread" laments Tanyug, the country's official press agency. Heavy handed movements to restore order are a real possibility in the futures of Poland and a post-Ceausescu Romania. Estonians and Lithuanians demonstrate for rights to national self-determination in the absence of discredited tools of control. The leader of the Soviet Union has been forced to admit that collectivization has divorced workers from the land and the means of production; meaning and value has been drained from the work and life of the peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Food shortages are endemic most everywhere on the map the socialist world. A relatively prosperous and contented Western Europe fears that the tremors of instability that sweep in an arc from the Baltic to the Adriatic will not confine themselves to their places of origin. Such was the socio-economic context of the XVth Christian and Marxist Dialogue on Peace held from 14 October to 16 October, 1988, in Moscow.

The International Peace Symposia have been organized to promote dialogue between competent, responsible Christians and Marxists who share a deeply reflected upon commitment to safeguard world peace regardless of irreconcilable differences. The first symposium was held in 1971 under the sponsorship of the Institute for Peace Research of the University of Vienna and the International Institute for Peace, also of Vienna. The Soviet Peace Committee (USSR) and the Institute for Peace and Understanding (USA) have since joined as sponsoring agencies of these now yearly meetings. The site of this year's conference was the Soviet Peace Committee Center. Fifty-six scholars representing fifteen countries, including the Vatican, were present. The theme of the dialogue was "International Humanism, New Thinking, and the Peace Issue." The term "New Thinking" of course refers to the conceptual planks that help constitute the perestroika social-political platform. Chief among the conceptual constructs are: commitment to the universal values of humanism; promotion of democratization of intra- and international relations; awareness of global interconnectedness among the areas of ecology, economics, and politics; respect for the principle

of polycentric pluralism; priority for the common over particular security; and the rejection of dogmatism, stereotyping, and military threat.

Four opening papers (two by Christians, two by Marxists) addressed the two agenda topics "The Relation between Class and All-Humanity Values" and "The Human Right to Live in Peace in the Framework of the Human Rights Concept." The following opinions and cautions were registered by the readers and participants in the general response period: the right to live in peace is the methodological prerequisite of all other rights; the idea of unquestioned, sovereign states is as a burned out star, for governmental entities do not exist to exert autonomous will but to contribute to the solution of supranational concerns (e.g., ocean pollution, ozone depletion, and nuclear threat); sensitivity to the plight of Third World should condition the motivation and content of peace initiatives; peace itself is not a valid subject for quest if it is isolated from the concept of human dignity; perhaps it is misguided to think that all noble human ideals could or should be transformed into legally protected rights.

On the second day the two topics were considered separately and intensely by the two study groups that were formed from the plenum. As directed, the study groups applied themselves to the following issues: The historical development of human rights within the frameworks of Christian tradition, international politics, and the United Nations; Problems of precise definition of the right to live in peace and the its implementation as a real human right; Who should be the proper bearer of a proposed right to peace? Individual persons? States? The international community?; Global aspects of social humanism; Strategies of stepwise implementation of the human right to live in peace.

Half of the third and last day of the conference was dedicated to study group reports. Of practical consequence was the commissioning of a committee to sound out international accords and covenants for material supporting a "peace as right" movement. The committee report is to be completed in time for next year's dialogue in the Netherlands. The conference was concluded with a tour of the Danilov monastery which was recently restored as a place of worship after years of use as an orphanage and factory. The abbot of the community answered questions about Soviet state-church relations in general and about religious formation in particular; commitment to the opening of more churches and the publication of more religious journals in the Soviet Union was announced without much accompanying detail.

Peter Stania, of the International Institute for Peace, suggested that these dialogues serve as a "scientific temperature reading of East-West relations." If this is indeed the case, Western participants found the lack of anti-American invective and the capacity for self-criticism on the part of the Soviets cool and refreshing. The affirmations that war is the violation of all human rights and that peace for the global village implies cooperation as a positive act are

significant contributions toward an improved climate for international discussions on all subjects and levels. Questions concerning the desirableness, definition, adjudication, application, and enforcement of any proposed right to peace remain heat-generating issues, as do the possible tools for the promotion of peace such as citizen diplomacy, support for conscientious objection, publication of military budgets, and exchanges of war industry information among the nations.

The economic component of New Thinking commands immediate and intense interest among reform minded Eastern Europeans. In the new way of thinking the notion that socialism and capitalism can develop in parallel isolation has become obsolete; affirmed is the notion that these two systems inevitably intersect and interact within the framework of common human civilization. Increasing numbers of economists are adopting the view that market relations can effectively function only when a commodities market exists side by side with capital investment and labor markets. (When it comes to dealing with unprofitable companies, even Poland's new Prime Minister has placed himself on record as a willing pupil of the new economic realism.) Save for the relatively prosperous East Germany any further discussions that tie peace initiatives to economic flexibility will receive a responsive listening on the part of Eastern Block countries that seek respite from the pressures of shortages and want.

The question concerning who should be the proper bearer of a proposed human right to peace also has special gravity for Eastern Europeans, especially those who commemorate in 1988 the twentieth anniversary of Czechoslovakia's bold theoretical and practical experiment that sought to express the relation between human values and the highest aspirations of socialism. The similarity between the ideals of New Thinking as spoken of in the Moscow Peace Dialogue and the goals of a movement which was brutally suppressed in the name of supranational, systemic stability will not be lost on interested commentators. As long as no less a person than Aleksander Yakovlev (Gorbachev's chief advisor and the man widely regarded as second only to the President in influence within the Soviet Union) continues to justify the 1968 movement against Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and four Warsaw Pact countries in terms of "preserving stability" (1), dialogue concerning the relative merits of having individual nations or the community of nations as designated bearers of the right to peace is of utmost necessity. Moscow's seeming rediscovery of the World Court and its growing willingness to submit itself to the Court's arbitral authority and procedures is a welcome offshoot of the new thinking in the cause of peace; Yet to be done is for the Soviet Union to respect the Soviet constitution and live up to their commitments under the Helsinki Accords that spell out every nation's right to self determination.

As a final note pertaining to the issue of peace bearer, to hear a representative of the Polish Peace Committee remark to a plenary session of the Moscow Dialogue in support of

the idea that freedom (and, by inference, peace) is not a gift to be given by any state indicates an openness to the grounding of a right to peace in less abstract, more personal levels of human existence.

There were numerous references within the dialogue to the "emerging reality of a common European House." Such a notion will gain credibility as such conferences continue to affirm and promote the following: a deeper understanding of the interrelationship between working class interests and those of humanity as a whole; international exchanges of leaders and recognized authorities in the scientific and cultural communities, public organizations and peace movements, political and religious groups; officially sanctioned discussions in which a variety of cultural and spiritual traditions are mined for solutions to common concerns. Here again, the Soviet Union can do much to temper the fears of its satellites - and gain support for the 1991 Moscow Human Rights Conference - by assuming a leading role in such endeavors.

As a final comment, to forge a linkage between New Thinking and the peace process is to posit common goals for both; the individual members of the socialist world need a coming to terms with the factors that threaten these goals as named by the chief promoter of New Thinking, i.e., dogmatic mentality, authoritarian-bureaucratic aberrations, and selfishness among those who have the responsibility of authority. (2)

(1) New York Times, October 28, 1988.

(2) Mikail Gorbachev; "To Restore the Image of Socialism through Democratization," a speech to the CPSU Central Committee, the heads of the mass media, ideological institutions and artistic unions, as published by Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1988.