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THE HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF PEACE

By Paul Bock

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Since 1981 a group of scholars has gathered almost annually to engage in Christian-Marxist dialogue in the pursuit of peace. The sixteenth gathering took place in Holland from August 28 to 31, 1989. For me it was the first opportunity to participate and it was an enlightening experience. Thirty-five participants gathered at the International School of Philosophy in Leusden. Countries represented included the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, West Germany, Austria, Holland, England, the United States and Canada. Sponsoring groups for the conference were the University Center for Peace Research, Austria; The International Institute for Peace, Austria; and the Institute for Peace and Understanding, U.S.A.

Regular participants pointed out that last year's meeting in Moscow was a break-through in terms of openness between East and West and that this openness was even greater in this meeting. That was apparent in the frequent use of the word "pluralism." In speeches and discussions it was recognized that we accept pluralism and draw upon all sources of knowledge to realize the human dimensions of peace.

This note was apparent in the opening address of the conference written by Prof. L. G. Istyagin of the Institute for Peace Research in Moscow. He was unable to come but his address was read by an Austrian, and other scholars from the Soviet Union responded to questions about the address. He stressed the importance of humanizing international relations, and expressed a view that a consensus is emerging in regard to reduction of violence, cooperation among the peoples of the world, use of technology for the benefit of humankind, modifications of industrial practices in order to preserve the environment, and the need to combat underdevelopment, especially in the Third World. As much as possible, he said, we need to de-ideologize international relations. Although the word "convergence" has in the past been a nasty word, we can think in such terms now, he added.

He recognized that Christians and Marxists are far apart in their understanding of the
human being but he saw points of contact, for example, in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin. At several points he quoted Dostoyevsky and Berdyaev, reflecting a willingness to draw upon the Russian Christian heritage. He did not think that class conflict was over, but he felt it could be carried on in a much less violent way. The Stalinist approach, he asserted was anti-Marxist.

The idea of cooperation toward a common goal by people of different persuasions is not new, he said. It existed in the battle against fascism and the United States is a product of that cooperation.

He saw reasons for hope in the Vienna Concluding Document implementing the Helsinki Final Act, and in the contributions of many volunteer organizations that work for peace, human rights, liberation, and ecology. Also he saw signs that the peoples of the world want to rely less on military solutions.

In the discussion it was pointed out that there was in Moscow an Institute of Man which is inter-disciplinary in nature and that it is working on new approaches to anthropology. When pressed as to the role of Marxism in present thought, Eastern Europeans insisted that it still provides the dominant perspective, and that despite proclamations in the West that Marxism is dead, it is very much alive. Current thinking is closer to Marx than some earlier applications, especially in the Stalinist period.

An indicator of the change of approach was a statement by Dr. Mikhail Krutogolov, professor of law at Moscow University and Vice-President of the Soviet Peace Committee. He said that ten years ago he would have asserted that economic and social rights are more important than political and civil rights, that the Soviet Union has built a paradise, and that it is a shame that other nations have not followed suit. But now, he said, we are abandoning these cliches, thereby shocking some people in the Soviet Union. Now it is increasingly clear that we must benefit from both the socialist and bourgeois revolutions, that we need both kinds of human rights, and that we need a human concept that is neither bourgeois nor socialist. He observed that some problems in the Soviet Union, for example, the ethnic problems, are not answered by simple slogans of the past. For solutions the Soviets will have to draw on knowledge from all sources.

The address by Dr. Istyagin set the tone for the workshop on "Man and Society: Individual, Community, and State" chaired by Dr. Deyan Pavlov of Sofia, Bulgaria. The other major address set the tone for the workshop on "Man and International Community" chaired by Dr. Gary Bittner of York College, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

That address in "Developments in Human Rights" was given by Dr. Piet Kooijmans, Professor of International Law at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands, and a member of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. His talk also expressed optimism. He saw signs of hope in recent Soviet statements indicating a greater willingness to accept
international surveillance of human rights, in Soviet emphasis on cooperation and de-emphasis on class struggle, in the willingness of member nations of the European Council to accept its judgments on human rights violations, and in a greater recognition in the West of the importance of economic and social rights.

Since World War II progress has been made in regard to the internationalization of human rights, but only recently have nations been willing to accept some international authority, he said. There is no means of enforcement. It still depends on persuasion, on preserving national honor, and on working within national interests.

There are some rights, he said, that cannot be fulfilled by a particular national government. One example would be the right to development. Clearly poor nations are dependent upon rich nations to realize that goal. Yet it would be difficult to put such a right into some kind of enforceable form. All nations are dependent upon each other to realize the right of peace.

The speaker saw signs that East and West are beginning to find common ground, and he felt that if the First and Second Worlds could do that, the Third World will also. This address was supplemented by a trip of the group to the Peace Palace in the Hague including a visit to the International Court of Justice.

In the discussion on human rights Dr. Siegrid Pöllinger of Vienna stressed the great importance of the Vienna Concluding Document and urged everyone to read it. The bitterness and accusations between East and West characteristic of previous conferences was not present at this meeting, she said. There was a clear recognition of both kinds of human rights. The progress in the European Council was noted in the discussion, and it was pointed out that Poland is applying for membership in the European Council and that it is expected that Hungary and the Soviet Union will apply.

The participants from Eastern Europe on the Marxist side were professors Deyan Pavlov (Bulgaria), Janusz Kuczynski (Poland), Herbert Bertsch (G.D.R.), Nikolai Kovalski and Mikhail Krutogolov (U.S.S.R.) and on the Christian side archimadrite Feofan Ahurkov (U.S.S.R.) and professor Botond Gaal (Hungary). Dr. Tadeusz Wyszynski formerly of Poland and now representing the Pontifical Commission on Dialogue with Non-Believers from the Vatican also participated.