Anti-communism and the Peace Movement

by **Robin Greyson**

It is not surprising to hear right wing critics attack the Peace Movement. The attempts to label disarmament groups as Soviet fronts and dupes is as predictable as it is transparent. No one has ever doubted either the anti-communism or the lack of accuracy of the *Reader's Digest* or Ronald Reagan. In fact, it would be more than just a little disturbing to find that the hysteric right was not up in arms. It is a measure of both the importance of the issue and the growing power of the Peace Movement to be taken so seriously.

More disturbing, however, are the criticisms that are beginning to come from the left, or at least from those who claim some association with the left. In places such as the *New Republic* we are beginning to hear calls for the Peace Movement to cleanse itself of Communists and their sympathizers. Communists, they claim, are little more than agents of the Soviet Union, and to allow people so clearly identified with Soviet policy to participate in peace organizations compromises the political autonomy the movement so desperately needs. By working with groups such as the U.S. Peace Council, or by allowing Communist affiliated organizations to become members of peace coalitions, it is argued, we merely add fuel to the fire of the right.

Let us admit that there are legitimate points of concern about the maintenance of the autonomy of peace organizations, but let us quickly add that these do not recommend the kind of policies that these anti-communist "friends" imply. Quite the opposite. These proposals, which appear to have the best interests of the non-aligned left at heart, are in fact little more than an attack on the basic principles of the Movement. It is important to oppose this kind of attack, not out of sympathy for the CP or the Soviet Union, but because it threatens the Peace Movement itself.

No one can argue with the right of an organization to protect itself from manipulation and colonization by outside groups. No one can deny the need for the Peace Movement to keep its autonomy from *both* sides of the Cold War where that is necessary for its political effectiveness. But this does *not* argue for a political witch hunt inside the Movement. Because of the importance of this issue, it is necessary to address it head on. There are three sets of concerns that need to be discussed. First, concerns about the organizational autonomy of the Peace Movement; second and more specifically, concerns about the relationship of the Peace Movement to Communist and Soviet groups; and finally, the larger implications of these anti-communist campaigns for the Peace Movement as a whole. I will discuss each in order.

Democracy, Autonomy, and the Peace Movement

The need to keep a coalition from falling under the control of an outside organization or group is a constant concern in coalition politics. There is, and there will always be, power fights between various groups inside coalitions. As any organization grows in power and influence, the desire to control that organization also grows—from all quarters. Current members of the leadership want to preserve their power. Alternative leadership groups want more open access to power. Religious groups want to see the organization take a more spiritual orientation. Women's groups want to see their issues given greater attention. Political parties want to see their candidates sitting on speaker platforms, and left

continued on page 5

Teacher continued

he had been requested twice. He received the same story at Escondido High. Rogers had been specifically requested as the principals had felt he was doing a good job.

However back at San Pasqual, an administrator told Roy that because student Douglas had complained about a class discussion he had led, he had been taken off the sub rolls. Douglas had complained that Roy was "un-American" by talking about socialized medicine and had used abrasive language in trying to intimidate her.

Incensed, Roy asked the California Teachers Association for aid but was told that the organization doesn't help substitute teachers. Then a month after the class a hearing on Roy's case was held at the Escondido Union School Board. A number of his former students presented a petition signed by 25 classmates stating that Rogers did his job well and in a professional manner. Suzanne Douglas, also the student representative to the Board, was allowed to read a statement outlining her complaints. Roy motioned to respond but the Board refused to let him speak. He asked whether he could present questions. This too was refused. In the end the Board upheld Roy's ban from the sub rolls.

Rogers sought advice from an attorney. He was told that it would be up to him to prove his first amendment rights had been violated by the District. He gave up that avenue of redress. Since the hearing, Roy hasn't subbed at all. But he has received a good amount of support from people in his community through letters and he's received numerous calls from his former students.

One of the main reasons he hasn't pursued this further, Roy admitted to the *Pie Shop*, was due to the recent success of his artwork; he had just won an award in an international art show in New York City. Roy summed up his feelings, "She won. I was effectively fired by one teenager."

Escondido students have lost a valuable and creative teacher. But apparently the District Board shares Douglas' views deeply enough to use this one complaint to kick him out. Discussing socialized medicine might make those young people question our capitalist health care system and even society itself. The shadow of censorship and repression has gronw deeper in this narrow corner of San Diego County. Substitute teachers will continue to not enjoy the rights of other teachers until those other teachers address the problems of those who fill in for them when they're absent.

Yet let's remember that only one student complained, that 25 of 26 signed the petition. And with his forced departure, Roy has provided them with the most profound lesson of all: despite the daily reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance, "liberty and justice for all" only applies to those who never question.

Peace Movement continued

groups want the organization to adhere to the one true political line (theirs). This process is known as progressive politics. *Democratic* progressive politics is the process in which a balance is struck without any one group dominating the others.

The difficulty comes when a group or individual seeks to take unfair advantage of this give and take. There is always the danger of "packed" meetings or speaker rosters dominated by a single tendency. It is important to remember, however, that manipulation is not a monopoly of any particular organization. Groups from the Moonies to the FBI to the Republican Party are all capable of pushing their own agenda. The way a coalition protects itself is not by establishing some kind of political litmus test, but by instituting the kind of internal procedures that guarantee democracy for *all* participants. (For example, requiring members of a coalition to state their political memberships as a condition of membership in the coalition, choosing steering committees on a structured basis, requiring quorums for decisions of policy, etc.) To focus on a group rather than a set of institutions is both bad politics and bad morality. Democracy in an organization is not guaranteed by denying any particular group their democratic rights.

If those who raise the issue of communist participation in peace groups are concerned about internal democracy, then their interests would be better served by redirecting their attention. But I don't believe this is their real concern. It is not that they are interested in strengthening the autonomy of these organizations, but in making sure that the spectrum of debate is confined to *their* agenda. One does not have to be a Russophile to have a secret agenda.

The Peace Movement and the U.S.S.R.

A more difficult issue is the relationship of the Peace Movement to Soviet dominated peace organizations. I think it is essential for the Peace Movement to remain autonomous from both sides of the nuclear arms debate. The moral power of the Movement originates in its ability to speak for all human beings concerned about survival. Ours is a third force, a point of leverage outside of immediate national interests. To give up this leverage would be both stupid and suicidal. No side in this geo-political conflict is without sin, and our responsibility is to speak truth to whichever power is threatening the peace.

Realistically, it must be admitted that both sides of the Superpower conflict would like to influence disarmament groups. When Soviet-affiliated groups press for blanket condemnation of the U.S. and complete support for the U.S.S.R., their machinations are clear and evident. But it is no less an attempt to manipulate the Peace Movement when U.S. public officials scream "Communist conspiracy" and recommend that our time would be better served by rooting out Russian sympathizers from our midst. Manipulation comes from both sources, and we must learn to live with it without hysteria or backing off from our goals.

It is important to understand the nature of both societies engaged in the arms race. The Soviet Union is nobody's version of the good society. Authoritarian towards its own population, and repressive toward those in Eastern Europe, it is hardly the embodiment of Socialist ideals. Evidence of its willingness to trample the rights of other peoples in the pursuit of its national self-interest can be found in its policies toward Poland and Afghanistan.

Does this make the Soviet Union a Nazi-like regime? Of course not. It is more than willing to crush popular movements that threaten its national interests, but this in no way distinguishes it from the United States. While the U.S. is less repressive at home, it is even more aggressive in its international politics. Who, after Viet Nam, the Bay of Pigs, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, El Salvador, and now Nicaragua, can believe that the U.S. has clean hands? The murder of countless thousands of Salvadoran peasants under the direction of U.S. advisors is enough of an example of the kind of brutality that the U.S. is willing to tolerate in its own quest for international domination.

In the area of nuclear arms, it has been the U.S. and not the Soviet Union that has led the arms race. It was this nation, not the U.S.S.R., that first devised and used nuclear weapons. It was this nation, not the U.S.S.R., that first developed the hyderogen bomb. It was this nation, not the U.S.S.R., that first developed ICBMs, MIRVs, and Cruise missiles. Finally, it was this nation, and not the U.S.S.R., that used its nuclear advantage to push its policies in the international arena (witness the Cuban missile crisis). The U.S.S.R. has been all too anxious to follow the lead of the U.S., but let's not forget who started the game in the first place.

Clearly, Soviet sponsored peace initiatives are different than those of the Peace Movement. Like any nation (including the U.S.), it seeks to maintain a margin of advantage in the process of negotiation. It would, of course, prefer to see the U.S. disarm just a little bit more than itself. Like any good horse trader, it seeks to lessen its burden of nuclear weapons production while maintaining the greatest strategic advantage for itself. This does not mean that either the Soviet Union or the U.S. is intrinsically incapable of real reductions in nuclear weapons; it merely implies that the Peace Movement must keep its eyes open when dealing with either side. Once more it is important to stress that the goal of the Peace Movement must be to remain autonomous from both sets of national interests. We may work with and support those national organizations and policies that we see furthering international peace and disarmament, but we can never simply identify with any one nation-state.

In a more practical stance, some anti-communits liberals contend that to argue on behalf of peace and disarmament to the American people, we must maintain a strict separation from anything Russian or communist. These "realists" argue that given the degree of anti-communism in this country, one must always maintain politically clean hands. Let us suspend for the time being the fact that this argument is neither democratic nor particularly principled, and take a look at its claims.

If it is believed that the Peace Movement, either here or abroad, is dominated by Soviet grups, it is simply wrong. The Peace Movement in this country, the *Reader's Digest* to the counter, is overwhelmingly autonomous from Communist organizations. Even that bastion of Marxist thought, the CIA, has admitted this. Yes, there are communists and communist affiliated organizations in the Peace Movement, but there are also Democrats, Baptists, Republicans, and even past heads of the CIA. The number of communists in the Peace Movement nationally and internationally is small, and their influence is marginal, as a recent discussion in the *Nation* points out.

continued on page 8