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East-West Dialogue during the Cold War years: Possibilities and Limitations

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I seek in this paper to identify the opportunities and limitations of East-West dialogue during the Cold War years mainly in the light of my own experience as a practitioner of such dialogue. It is not an academic paper but a personal testament. I was a university lecturer in physics who had graduated by specialising in pure and applied nuclear physics.

In 1956 I took part in the first Aldermaston march campaigning against the development, deployment and possible use of nuclear weapons. A year later I spent three weeks in Moscow at the World Youth Festival. Contacts made there reinforced my commitment to nuclear disarmament. Yet through my experience there of totalitarianism I acquired a commitment to ideological disarmament as a necessary step towards mutual security.

In 1982 as détente broke down, I left university work to serve as the Europe Secretary of Quaker Peace and Service focussing on the peoples of the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, including the USSR.

East-West dialogue during the Cold War years was fraught with difficulties arising from ideological and military confrontation that alienated people either side of the Iron Curtain from each other. Western peace movements endeavoured to bridge this divide in the interests of peace and human rights.

This became a more pressing need with the breakdown of détente in the early 1980's as more sophisticated nuclear weapons were deployed: SS20's in the USSR and Cruise and Pershing 2 missiles in the West. The twin track decision to complement this increased deployment by agreements on disarmament measures was not apparently being heeded.

The increased danger of mutually assured destruction, MAD, spurred on the formation of the European Nuclear Disarmament movement, END, and protests like those of the Greenham Common women. Such protests could not be reciprocated in communist states because of the repression that their regimes imposed on activities not controlled by their Communist Parties. Only official bodies sanctified by the Party could organise demonstrations that were not permitted to be critical of the actions of their own governments. This was particularly true in the USSR and the German Democratic Republic, GDR.

East-West dialogue was asymmetric. Simply put: in the East everyone was listening, but nobody dared talk; in the West, many people were speaking, but hardly anyone was listening. 52 years after the first Aldermaston march for nuclear disarmament in the UK, Britain not only continues to deploy nuclear weapons but is actually modernising them. The UK government, backed up by elements in the British media, insists now as it did during the Cold War that they have a better regard for securing the livelihood of British citizens than does the peace movement.

For dialogue to be effective between partners, each should be able to feel what it is like to be in the shoes of the other. I proposed to a communist that I met in Leningrad in 1983 that we should continue our dialogue so long as I could give an account of the Soviet reasons for the breakdown of détente that was satisfactory to him and he of the western reasons. 'If we can score more than five out of ten, we will carry on', I suggested. We gave each other nine out of ten and had several meetings subsequently that served to discern some common grounds of mutual security.

Despite the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 that purported to guarantee the freedom of citizens to associate freely, and to leave and return to their countries at their own volition, in the early 1980's citizens of communist states enjoyed these rights only if they were committed to the Party. If they did not, their freedom to assembly and to communicate freely especially with citizens from the West was made clandestine and liable to harassment and persecution.

As one Russian writer said to me who eventually became the first Russian Quaker in modern times, 'to survive, do not think; if you must think, do not write down your thoughts; if you write anything, for goodness sake do not send it to anyone'. There was at that time no Internet communication that upholds an international civil society today through global communication, albeit suppressed by some regimes like those of Burma and China.

In this paper I will describe the purposes and limitations of East-West dialogue primarily as perceived by Quakers who were in the 17th century amongst the first European peace movements based on their pacifist witness and service. Amongst their service was the dispensing of food and medical supplies in the famine regions of Russia and the Ukraine before and after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 (1, 2). This relief exercise gave some basis for contacts with the Soviet empire – it was described in the Great Soviet encyclopaedia!

Quakers are a small religious movement that existed in Communist Europe only in the GDR where they were scarcely harassed by the regime. This was partly due to the reputation of Quakers in Germany for their feeding programmes at the end of the two world wars, and because Quakers were instrumental in saving some communists together with Jews and gypsies from the Nazis through enabling them to leave Germany (3).

Being a pacifist body, having only the power of the powerless, Quakers have been able to work with representatives of governments without being misrepresented as being allies or supporters of military power or injustice. To promote peace through disarmament and justice, Quakers throughout the Cold War years endeavoured to bring a broad range of people in face-to-face contact in off-the-record meetings.

Arranging discreet meetings between diplomats continues to be an important exercise of Quakers primarily arranged through their United Nations offices in Geneva and New York. Through the Geneva office several meetings for diplomats were held in Europe during the Cold War years with the participation of senior diplomats from East and West. They were residential over several days during which informal conversations could take place that explored ways in which the arms race could be reduced and basic human needs could be met (4).

I participated in three consecutive annual meetings in Sweden of diplomats associated with the CSCE process that focussed on ways forward in the Conventional Forces in Europe, CFE, negotiations. Several participants were

of ambassadorial rank and the last meeting in particular contributed significantly to the successful conclusion of the CFE process.

In London, meetings arranged by Quakers for diplomats were held at William Penn House. (This quiet off-the-record venue played a catalytic role in the London talks on independence for Zimbabwe). The meetings were regularly attended by diplomats from the Federal German and German Democratic governments. William Penn House served as possibly the unique place where they could listen to each other.

In addition, whilst serving as the Europe Secretary of Quaker Peace and Service, I was continually in contact with diplomats in the London embassies of the USSR, Poland, the Czechoslovak, Hungarian and German Democratic Republics, mindful that they were supervised by their security services and several of them were for example KGB or GDR Stasi officers.

Nevertheless my wife and I entertained some of these diplomats in our home, and were entertained by them in their flats or in restaurants. Diplomats are mouthpieces for their governments and cannot therefore be regarded as elements of civil society. Yet most diplomats whether from the East or the West during the Cold War had both outer voices saying what they are told to say, and inner voices that may question and not believe in what that outer voice was saying. Given discreet circumstances they revealed opening ways to dialogue, sometimes by their body language. In any case they could be instrumental in obtaining visas and in contacting official bodies within communist states.

Such contacts opened up possibilities for dialogue and yet imposed limitations in restricting dialogue to representatives and organs of the communist parties, such as card carrying academics, and Peace Committees or Friendship Societies answerable to the international committees of the ruling communist party. Such contacts could have undermined the integrity of a peace movement like Quakers who are non-governmental and integral members of the civil society in the West. However there was a hazard in rejecting such contacts for they promote dialogue with realistic prospects of alleviating distress and improving détente.

In my experience such official contacts did not exclude contacts with groups within the civil society in the East like Solidarity in Poland, the Charter 77 group in Czechoslovakia, and the Moscow Trust Group.

To take no risks in opening up purposeful East-West dialogue was to my mind to risk everything; however taking risks is taking risks. My fear in making scores of visits to communist Europe was that I might endanger the liberty of the people that I met rather than a refusal to obtain visas for further visits. In nine years of such visits, 1982 to 1991, neither of these fears materialised. On the contrary I was able to play a role in liberating dissenters from prisons or mental asylums.

Once I was sitting next to Father Oliver McTernan at a meeting addressed by a member of Keston College who asserted that communists were not to be trusted. Oliver McTernan was prominent in the Catholic Pax Christi Peace and Justice movement; he had made many visits to communist states. 'How on earth does God trust us', he whispered into my ear!

In 1982, when I began my service as Europe Secretary of Quaker Peace and Service, QPS, Edward Thompson, the historian and co-founder of END, warned me that he felt that British Quakers were in danger of becoming dupes of communist peace committees. He reminded me of the Quaker sailor whose ship was assailed by pirates, one of whom was clambering on board. The Quaker seized him and threw him into the ocean saying 'Friend, we have no need of thee!' Paul Oestreicher, an experienced Anglican and Quaker with much experience of Central and Eastern Europe, advised me to be sure that I should be making nearly everyone whom I met to feel somewhat uncomfortable with me! Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, head of the Russian Orthodox Church in Britain, advised me to ignore anything said by Orthodox priests in Russia if Party officials were with them 'unless their eyes darted up several times to heaven!' Engagement in dialogue with integrity was a daunting business.

There was readily available information about human rights abuses in communist Europe from organisations like Amnesty International, Helsinki Watch, the Campaign Against Psychiatric Abuse, CAPA, and Keston College that provided alerts about the suffering of religious believers. To enter into East-West dialogue without being acquainted with such bad news would have been to lack integrity. On the other hand I believed it to be essential to be briefed about positive developments within communist states as described by their officials and their media.

Here are two examples when working with Paul Oestreicher I was able to help releasing prisoners of conscience in the USSR.

Olga Medvedkova was a member of the Moscow Trust Group that initially launched their proposals for increasing confidence between the superpowers. The Group then was comprised of refuseniks, Jews who had been refused the right to emigrate. The Group was perceived by Western peace movements as being a unique example of an independent peace movement in the USSR. I

had met Olga and other members of the Group quite often from 1983. I once heard that Olga, pregnant by then, had been sentenced to six months in jail for hitting a security official. Olga was, I believed, a peaceable person. So not only was this offence unlikely, but that kind of charge was how dissidents were framed by the KGB. They had even put her husband Yuri, a gentle Jewish academic in his late fifties, in jail for two weeks for 'hooliganism'.

I asked the Quaker East-West Committee for permission to take this matter up with the Soviet Embassy in London. Paul Oestreicher, a seasoned Quaker/Anglican socialist well versed in the principles and practices of Communism and a past Chairman of Amnesty International, and I were delegated to do so. I had met the Minister Counsellor at the embassy on several occasions and so we already had a good personal contact. I knew him to be a person of some integrity. Once after a diplomats' meeting on the troubles of Northern Ireland, as we walked to his car, instead of the customary observation that of course nothing like that occurred in the Soviet Union thanks to Communism, he said 'Peter, we have similar problems'.

Paul Oestreicher and I agreed to be sensitive and discreet with the diplomat when we met him in the scarlet reception room of the Soviet embassy with its large strident portrait of Lenin. We took with us a copy of the information that we had received from Amnesty International about Olga's case. 'We have received this information', we said, 'and we believe that if it were true this would be damaging to your government'. 'I will contact Moscow and check it out', the Minister Counsellor volunteered.

A week later we heard that Olga had been released. The diplomat phoned me and invited me to see him again. 'About that information you gave me. I checked it out with Moscow and was told that it was not true'. We looked at each other silently for a while before the diplomat continued. 'If you ever hear anything like this again, don't write to me about it, and don't take part in any demonstration outside the embassy. But for goodness sake come and see me'.

In another case of oppression, Keston College and CAPA had advised me that the leader of an ecumenical group in Moscow, Sandra Riga, had been incarcerated in a mental hospital run by the KGB as he was said to be suffering from 'sluggish schizophrenia', a condition not recognised by psychiatrists outside the USSR. It implied that he was an independent thinker.

Sandra advised me on his release that his offence was to counsel members of Komsomol, the Communist Youth League, who had become disillusioned

about the practices of Communism and someone had informed the KGB about this. In the mental asylum Sandra was given large injections of sulphonamide. He told me that this left him 'hanging on to God by his fingernails'.

Paul Oestreicher and I were in Moscow at the invitation of the Soviet Peace Committee and Paul was given the chance to meet the Soviet President Andrei Gromyko when he pleaded for the release of Sandra. A few weeks later, when I was again in Moscow in the company of another unofficial ecumenical group, Sandra suddenly appeared and sat next to me to my great relief.

Neither of these humanitarian interventions would have been possible without the help of Soviet officials.

Before describing more of my own experiences I wish to respect the East-West dialogue of two bodies that expressly addressed and sought to mitigate the risks of nuclear warfare that could well have been triggered off by mistaking the intentions of the other side or by making a pre-emptive first strike. These were the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear Warfare, IPPNW, and the Pugwash movement that also focussed on wider issues. Their annual residential meetings succeeded in bringing together leading scientists and humanists that were respected by governments East and West.

I also respect the initiatives of Mothers for Peace, established by two elderly Quakers about 1982, that enabled contacts to be made by women across the East-West divide with the restriction that their hosts in communist states were the official women's committees. The president of the Soviet Women's committee was a well known woman astronaut! I believe that there was a genuine dialogue through these contacts between women that focussed on the hopes and fears of family life, and of other women's interests, that transcended limitations of dialogue at a time of East-West tension.

Other bodies such as the British-Soviet Friendship Society and Pensioners for Peace often served as mouthpieces for Soviet propaganda, scarcely credible partners in East-West dialogue.

I participated in meetings arranged by the GB-USSR Association supported by the British Foreign Office that served to bring to Britain writers and academics from Russia that primarily were not aligned with the regime and who could provide a non-aligned view of the human condition in their country. Similar meetings were held in the Pushkin Club in London where I met writers critical of the human rights record of the USSR in the company of Russian emigres.

British Quakers were able to maintain an office in Moscow until 1933. Its purpose was humanitarian. It was reopened in 1991 by Roswitha and myself but only by my obtaining a journalist's visa. During the mid 1950's British and American Quakers were able to re-open dialogue through an invitation from the House of Friendship in Moscow, the offices of the Union of Friendship Societies that included the USSR-GB and USSR-USA Friendship Societies. They were controlled by the CPSU and were faithful to the ideology and practice of Marxism-Leninism.

This contact led to an annual series of bilateral seminars with Soviet and British participants alternately in the USSR and in Britain, and a similar series of seminars with Soviet and American participants that continued until the end of the Cold War. A broad range of British academics, media persons and individuals from the British peace movements took part in these seminars. The Soviet participants included academics especially from the US-Canada Institute, the Institute of History, the Diplomatic Academy, the High Party School, and media persons. Before and after the seminars visits were made to institutes and other places, and some visits were made clandestinely in Moscow to individuals in alternative associations including the Moscow Trust and ecumenical groups.

Seminar themes included 'happiness' ('this was a unique opening as happiness was not on the Party agenda', one participant told me years afterwards), and the role of the media in alleviating East-West tension. The Soviet apparatchik who organised this seminar in Socchi by the Black Sea at its concluding meeting produced a draft communiqué including the phrase that 'participants concluded that the role of the media should be to reduce East-West tension'. The Western participants protested that nobody in the West had the right to say what its media should or should not publish. Its media were free and uncontrolled. The apparatchik was embarrassed for he admitted that he had written the draft communiqué before the seminar had begun and that it would appear on the front page of Pravda, the Party newspaper, the next day. At our insistence this was withdrawn. East-West dialogue in the USSR before Gorbachev was indeed asymmetric.

As with most seminars, the informal one-on-one conversations were the most revealing. In early 1987 I walked across a Sussex field with one of the Soviet participants who became Gorbachev's public relations person. He told me that the USSR was about to let Poland go its own way. 'You mean, without Soviet intervention?', I queried. 'Yes', he confirmed. 'You realise what this might lead to?', I remarked. 'Yes', he replied. Did we appreciate that two years later the Berlin wall would be breached?, I wonder.

Some younger Soviet academics were able to tag on to these seminars. One of them took me aside in 1983 and asked me to get him some of Edward Thompson's books, forbidden fruit at that time, which I gave him on a subsequent visit.

I requested the USSR-GB Society to establish a reciprocal series of visits of prominent people between the USSR and the UK. Amongst such people that came to the UK by this arrangement and who spoke at universities and other places were the deputy head of the US-Canada Institute, Yuri Zamoshkin (whose father was the director of the Tretyakov Gallery during the Stalin years. He prevented its many religious paintings from being removed as Stalin had ordered), and Fyedor Burlatsky, editor of Literaturnaya Gazyeta, the well known weekly that had quite daring political columns. Unfortunately despite many attempts the USSR-GB society would not honour the reciprocity and no prominent British person visited the USSR through this arrangement.

During the 1960's Quakers made contacts with the Communist Youth Organisation in the USSR from which sprang a series of trilateral work camps in the USSR, the USA and Britain with young people. These were followed up by international work camps arranged by Quakers with the official youth committees from the communist states of Europe. Often the work camps in communist states were of a desultory nature, and the integrity of some of the young communists was dubious, but nevertheless contacts were made that otherwise would not have been possible.

The Soviet participants were trusted souls of the Party or the Komsomol, the Communist Youth League, people who enjoyed the privilege of travel outside the USSR and who could be given the risk of contacting non-communists in the West. The CPSU members comprised only about 9% of the population, a substantial limitation to dialogue, but if the dialogue was to have any effect on decision makers then necessarily Party members had to be involved. But they were not a distinct clone of ideologues: their allegiance to Party doctrine and Marxism-Leninism had various shades of hue, and many participants had taken Party membership simply to obtain a job within academia or the media, and to gain advancement in it. To refuse Party membership was not only to be restricted to the lower ranks but also to be open to suspicion and control by agents of state security.

Contacts with such people were an essential exercise in dialogue and I will describe its practice later in this paper.

Firstly I want to describe contacts and dialogue arranged through the Peace Committees and Councils of communist states. The International Committees of the Communist Parties determined their purposes of their peace organisations that were primarily to promote their work for peace and disarmament, ostensibly official policies, but they were given latitude in exploring contacts with Western peace movements.

Some Quakers had made contact with the Soviet Peace Committee during the Moscow Olympics of 1980; its Vice-Presidents included Vikenti Matvaev, the Foreign Editor of Izvestia, the Soviet government paper, Chingis Aitmatov, the Kyrgyz author of a *A Day lasts more than a Thousand Years*, and a Russian Orthodox Metropolitan. I attended one of the Committee's international gatherings early in 1983 whose plenary sessions were devoted to promoting the peace proposals of the Soviet Union, a one sided exercise of propaganda not altogether without some merit. The independent Moscow Trust Group had held a press launch the previous June with reporters only from the West. It proposed a series of measures for increasing confidence between the USSR and the USA, credible indeed, but this Group had subsequently received blistering attacks from the Soviet media and the Peace Committee.

I arranged a private meeting with its senior officials in the vain hope that this harassment would cease and that the Group's members would be invited to future international meetings arranged by the Peace Committee. This happened only after about five years and just before most of the Trust Group was given visas to emigrate to Israel. I met them on their way in Vienna when they had altered their destination to the USA and Canada. Some of them had their parents with them without a word of English. Some were unwell. 'God help them when they get to the USA and need medical treatment', Edward Thompson remarked to me.

In March 1983 with another Quaker I was invited to lunch by Alexei Bychkov, the General Secretary of the Union of Baptists in the USSR. They had just one small downtown church in Moscow that was often straining at its seams to accommodate its large congregation. Alexei told us that he had just heard on the radio that President Reagan at a meeting of Southern States' Baptists in the US referred to the USSR as 'the focus of all evil in the modern world'.

After lunch, I had arranged to drop in on Vikenti Matvaev in his Izvestya office to find out his views about ways in which confidence and trust could be built up between the USSR and the US. I had given him some questions to consider three days before. 'Have you heard what I have just heard?', he enquired as I entered his office. 'Yes', I said. 'Then you know why I cannot at present answer your questions. Let's have tea and a Quaker silence together', he suggested, which we did.

Later that day I bought a copy of the Russian satirical weekly Krokodil. In it was a caricature of President Reagan, revolvers in both hands, in a cowboy

suit plastered with swastikas. Such was the negative stereotyping between the US and the USSR at that time. Little did Reagan appreciate that next to the seat of the Soviet government in the Kremlin were three magnificent Orthodox cathedrals albeit then denied their primary purpose of celebrating the liturgy. Six years later there was Reagan with Gorbachev right by those cathedrals.

Quakers decided in their East-West Committee to arrange reciprocal delegations of British citizens and those of Soviet republics to visit each other's countries. I persuaded the Soviet Peace Committee, SPC, to arrange visits to many parts of the USSR that included cities in Siberia, Georgia, the North Caucasus, Uzbekistan and the Soviet Far East, where we were the first Western group to visit Birobizhan reached by train from Khabarovsk. Stalin established Birobizhan the 1920's for Jews. This was a short lived experiment as Jews from other countries discovered that both the place, very cold in winter and ridden with mosquitoes in summer, and the Soviet regime were highly uncongenial. Realising that this was a particularly sensitive visit I was well briefed beforehand by the secretary of British Soviet Jewry group in London. In Birobizhan, Hebrew appeared to be proscribed as it was elsewhere in the USSR. The town had a Yiddish theatre and a Yiddish newspaper was published there. The visit at my insistence to the synagogue was an anti-climax. None of our hosts was in the least enthusiastic about going there; the elderly Rabbi, I was told, had been ill for some time.

We were driven to the outskirts of the town and stopped outside what appeared to be a small shack. 'It's locked', said the communist officials with a sigh of relief. However our arrival had been noticed by members of a nearby Baptist church and an elderly member came shuffling along with the key. A cloud of dust fell on us as we entered the synagogue. The cupboard housing the roll of the Torah was half off its hinges and the sacred roll had clearly not been read for a long time. At the most a congregation of ten or twelve could have squeezed into that synagogue.

When the Baptists there urged us to visit their place, our hosts smiled faintly. We were well received. A banner strung right across the choir stalls behind the pulpit proclaimed that *Christ is Risen*. We had come within a month of Easter.

In Khabarovsk we went to the one and only Russian Orthodox church, the Church of the Nativity, I believe. The priest had not yet arrived and so we talked with one of the deacons, a Falstaff build of a man with a flowing beard and a well worn hassock. 'What was it like for Christians in the times before perestroika?', I asked. 'I give thanks to God for the times before perestroika',

he replied with his full bass voice. 'And what is it like for Christians in this time of perestroika'?, I continued. 'I give thanks to God for the time of perestroika', came the reply. There is surely something constant and unchanging about the Orthodox, I concluded. The priest, however, had more to say and accepted an invitation to meet us again before we left. He said that even when members of his congregation were dying he was not allowed to visit them. He was taking some risk in meeting us.

Apart from being on a delegation, I made two to four visits annually to the USSR at the invitation of the SPC, sometimes with another Quaker, with the informal agreement that I would make official visits until early evening after which I was to be left free to visit whomsoever I wished. These unofficial visits included two members of the Moscow Trust Group, unofficial ecumenical groups including that held in the flat of Andrei Bessmertni, leader of an underground church in the USSR, especially in the Baltic Republics. Often I met such a group in the home of a woman where our evening would begin with a quiet worship after the manner of Quakers. I made separate visits to Tatiana Pavlova, the Russian Orthodox and Quaker believer, and until the late 1980's she would urge me not to tell her of any of the other unofficial visits that I was making. The official visits included those to academic institutes and schools, as well as discussions with their senior staff.

Dialogue by Quakers in the German Democratic Republic was circumscribed by needing to protect the small Quaker group there. One Quaker of Jewish parents had been rescued from the Nazis. She left Germany with the Kindertransport arranged by British Quakers. Her parents perished in the Holocaust. She more often than other British Quakers made pastoral visits to East German Quakers and to members of the Lutheran Church.

Her visits preceded the first seminar held in East Berlin in the early 1980's that was made possible by the publication of the Olof Palme report on mutual or common security that was approved by the GDR government. The seminar coincided with the Solidarity uprising in Poland and when I referred to this whilst crossing the street with one of the host Quakers I was told to shut up in no uncertain way. The seminar was a purposeful exercise in dialogue but criticisms of governments were mutually excluded. Two or three such meetings were held in the Quaker centre in East Berlin with the participation of members of the ad hoc disarmament group within the Churches in the GDR and British Quakers such as Adam Curle, Wolf Mendl and myself.

East German Quakers were not in unity over their relations with the Communist government. One who arranged the seminars refused to sign a statement approving the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and his job as a

scientist in a factory was only saved by the diplomacy of its director. Another, Emil Fuchs, was a friend and supporter of Walter Ulbricht, the first General Secretary of the GDR Communist Party, and another served on the council of the Friedensrat, the GDR Peace Council.

On these and other visits to the GDR I met members of some informal groups within the Churches and with individuals from other unofficial peace movements. Their commitment to nonviolence was instrumental in the successful demonstrations in Leipzig and Dresden that heralded the fall of the Berlin wall and the GDR government. In the interim government before German unification, at least two of the Church leaders, whom I had previously met, became government ministers.

In the GDR and the USSR I had several conversations with activists outside the Party who were concerned about the pollution of the environment. The Party was not only indifferent to this but regarded any agitation by citizens about this as a threat. In Leningrad I met a staff member of the astronomical observatory there, who was concerned about the pollution of the River Neva and had access to some measurements of it. He was being harassed by the Party for revealing details of it to some workers whom he had been giving an extramural course on astronomy that was laced by environmental matters.

We met at his suggestion in the graveyard of the Alexander Nevsky monastery where Tchaikovsky is buried. 'Only the dead can observe us here', he said. He told me that the local communists had ordered his extramural class to cease but he took them to court wielding one of their documents that declared that academics had the right and duty to educate the workers. 'The court upheld that right', he said, 'and the class has resumed'.

Opportunities for dialogue in Czechoslovakia occurred though meetings of the Christian Peace Conference based in Prague. This body included Christians from communist states and had the limitation of being approved by the Communist authorities on the understanding that its Eastern European members toed the line of Party propaganda or at least did not stray far from it. Its reputation prospered during the Prague Spring but suffered disrepute after the invasion of Prague in 1968 when most of its officials resigned and were replaced by persons compromised to some extent by their association with the incoming harsh regime.

Towards the end of that regime Quakers accepted several invitations from its official Peace Committee whose officials perceived that the regime was faltering. With several Quakers I had meetings with political activists of the Charter 77 group in their flats. A meeting with Christian pastors of that

group whose license to preach had been withdrawn was held in a restaurant where the waiters ensured that we would not be disturbed by intruders or informers.

During the Solidarity period I went with Peter Herby of the Quaker United Nations office in Geneva and Mark Salter on a visit to Warsaw and Krakow where we met members of informal peace and human rights groups, members of the lay Catholic movement and staff of the Polish International Affairs Institute who were amongst the more liberal Party members. Subsequently Quakers were involved in visits arranged by the Polish Peace committee in its last days.

END members urged Quakers to be seen to be befriending and supporting the independent peace groups in the East, often small groups of dissidents. END members were suspicious of these meetings that Quakers were arranging with representatives of communist organisations or GONGO's, government organised non-governmental organisations!, for they knew that some Quakers had gone overboard in their support of what really were the disarmament proposals of communist regimes, or still more dubiously, supported the view that the collectivised social rights within the communist states outweighed their abuses of individual human rights.

END in its early years was adamant that participation in its annual conventions should be open to all members of the civil society and that they would not tolerate participation solely by representatives of communist bodies from the east. The convention in Berlin decided that invitations to future conventions could be extended to the Soviet Peace Committee, for example, so long as they could guarantee that the Moscow Trust Group could also attend.

I pointed out that such an invitation was in fact at that time one that could not be accepted: it was a non-invitation. In later conventions like the one in Vienna both the aligned and non-aligned peace movements from the USSR were present. Attempts to force representatives of these bodies to be together in the early 1980's were laughable if not absurd as described for example in Ann Pettitt's recent book on how the Greenham Peace Camp began and the Cold War ended (5).

The harsh and ludicrous persecution of independent peace groups in communist states in the early 1980's was a product of ideological stubbornness and the fears of particularly the states' security forces of losing control. Unfortunately this led to a litany of acts of arbitrary arrests of independent activists that often monopolised the feelings of western peace

activists like Ann Pettitt and which meant that my meetings with the Moscow Trust Group for example were taken up with their grievances rather than the substance of their peace proposals.

Mark Reitman, one of the original Moscow Trust Group, arranged for me to meet him for the first time at a Moscow metro station in early 1983. We spotted each other in its ornate central arcade. As we left the station we passed a large bust of Lenin in one of his strident postures. 'I've always wanted to meet a Quaker', Mark said, 'what do Quakers do with a Hitler or a Stalin?' Straight away he continued as if in the same sentence: 'We are being followed. We'll try and shake him off.'. He led me into the rear quarters of an institution whilst I asked him about himself. When we were sure that we were detached from our watcher, Mark said: 'I'm a mathematician but was dismissed when I applied to emigrate. As a Jew I applied to go to Israel but I really aim to get my family and myself to the USA'. Then he told me about the other Jews in the Trust group and their aims and practices as we walked far along a main road. It was very cold, and I was alarmed when Mark said he suffered from Parkinson's disease, diabetes and a touch of tuberculosis. 'Let's drop into a cafe', I suggested innocently. 'Too dangerous', said Mark. In any case I noticed that there were no cafes: unmonitored conversations were not encouraged. So we walked and walked until we were both blue with cold as Mark had so much that he wanted to share with me.

Soon after I took up my position as Europe Secretary of QPS, its East-West Committee agreed that I could arrange meetings between representatives of the Peace Movements in the West with those in the East. With the co-operation of the Quaker Council for European Affairs, QCEA, two such meetings were held in its large offices in Brussels. The participation by END orientated representatives of the Western peace movement in these meetings was slight. On the other hand the involvement of representatives from the East was substantial, especially from Hungary and Bulgaria. On the whole they were leading academics specialising in international relations, who were far from simply being Party hacks.

Amongst them were a couple of Hungarian academics, Peter Hardy, who subsequently became director of the International Relations Institute in Budapest, and Arnold Balogh, a senior lecturer in international relations for the High Party School, the Communist Party's university. Subsequently Tom Leimdorfer, a Hungarian Quaker who had escaped through barbed wire into Austria during the 1956 uprising and myself visited Budapest at the invitation of the Hungarian Peace Council. Hungary then had the reputation of being the softest of Communist countries in terms of the relative freedom of expression and consequently its fewer political prisoners.

Several members of the Peace Committee took us to one of the best restaurants in town for a meal, and over coffee Tom Leimdorfer gaily related the following tale:

Shortly after the 1956 revolution in Budapest, the Party convened a meeting of workers. The Party Secretary said 'comrades, in the current conditions in our country, two times two is six'. A worker put up his hand and said 'Comrade Secretary, the truth as I know it is that two times two is four'. Immediately two plain-clothes members of the state security service took him out and at his trial for anti-state agitation he was sentenced to ten years hard labour in a prison colony. On his release he went to another meeting convened by the Party at which its Secretary said 'comrades, in the conditions of Hungary today, two times two is five'. The worker again put up his hand and said 'the truth as I know it is that two times two is four'. Immediately two plain clothes officers took him out. This time they took him to the best restaurant in town and gave him an excellent meal with good wine. Afterwards they said to the worker 'Of course we know that two times two is four, but it is a little too early to admit it'. Our hosts politely smiled: no doubt the tale was well known in Budapest.

In concluding I feel that I ought to try and evaluate the significance of the kind of East-West dialogues that I have described. Did they contribute to the easing of tensions and the end of the Cold War? Indeed, did they achieve anything?

Objectively I feel that all that can be recorded is that the peace movements promoted and engaged in a variety of face to face East-West meetings despite the impediments to a free range of contacts. This is a historical fact and the history of human kind during this time would have been impoverished without the pursuit of such contacts in the interests of peace and justice. Objectively it is hard if not impossible to prove that the content of such dialogue contributed to the easing of tensions and to disarmament measures. Subjectively I am convinced that in dialogue we touch and transform that which lies deepest within each person, the bedrock of love, truth, beauty and goodness.

Whilst I cannot remember the content of most of the dialogues in which I participated during the Cold War years, I know that they affirmed these universal values that are the basis of mutual security.

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