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CND and Dissident Peace Groups in Socialist Countries

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Summary:

This paper, authored by George Hutchinson for discussion by the CND Council, raises the question of whether the CND should be dealing only with the "official" peace groups in Warsaw Pact countries (which were controlled by the Communist government), or whether the CND should be engaging more extensively with "unofficial" peace groups run by dissidents. This debate continued within the UK peace movement throughout the 1980s.

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C.N.D. AND DISSIDENT PEACE GROUPS IN SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

From George Hutchinson

June 1983

I am very seriously worried by the pressures on us to give uncritical support to 'unofficial' peace groups in the Eastern Block countries. The latest example is the paper by Jean McCollister, Ann Pettitt and Karmen Cutler dated May 30th. 1983. If we give way to these pressures we shall cut ourselves off from influencing the much larger, more influential and more popular official peace movements and seriously impair our credibility and influence as a single-minded campaign for nuclear disarmament and peace.

Our only concern as a movement should be with other groups in respect of their function as peace groups. The fact that we may have sympathy with them because they are in any way repressed may effect us as individuals but is not a thing for C.N.D. as such. If we went up that path we should spend our time campaigning for tortured prisoners in Chile, Turkey, Iraq - you name it - and for people killed by police in France, U.S.A., Japan, Ireland, England and all the other countries where unfriendly people could with great justification point their finger. We should then dissipate our energies and our support; we should have fallen into one of the traps which ended the first wave of C.N.D.

So we should not be being told how hard-pressed the people are that we are invited to support corporately, we should be asking what their policies are and then asking whether they are desirable (which no doubt they are in an ideal world) and also whether they are realistic and those which C.N.D. would advocate itself if it were working within the countries concerned and under the governments they have and the external threats that they perceive. We advocate immediate nuclear disarmament in this country believing it to be practical politics. I doubt if we could have a mass movement advocating that in the U.S.A.; it would not be practical politics there until there is trust between the super-powers. Neither would they be practical in the U.S.S.R. Most people, including I suspect many of our members, ^{do not} actually read what the Soviet government says. Their statement of the end of May is appended in translation; it was largely selectively abstracted in our press. Reading it, can we seriously doubt that the great majority of the Soviet people honestly believe that their government is working for peace and nuclear arms reduction? And can we afford to cut ourselves off in any way from their official peace movements, simply because they are official and do not go as far as we would wish the world to go, any more than we can cut ourselves off from the Freeze Movement in the U.S.A.?

There is an obvious temptation to join the band-waggon of hate against the Soviet Union just because of the slander on us that we are pro-Soviet. If we do we shall just lose credibility, lose support of a lot of our active members and also undermine our efforts for a peaceful world. What is more we shall not save ourselves from slandered; liars have other lies they can tell. Our strength must be in objectivity, and the fact is that power politics is not nice and no government is even nearly perfect; but my personal experience and my reading makes me sure that the Socialist countries give their peoples some advantages and some disadvantages over ours, and the differences are more the result of history and outside forces than of a different form of economics. Most Russians are more peace-loving than most Englishmen. We have to make them feel we are their friends.

