

Religion & Democracy

A Newsletter of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

March 1982

IRD Welcomes Christian Peace Concern

The Executive Committee of the Institute on Religion and Democracy called for "thorough and responsible" Christian dialogue on disarmament and peace at its February 22 meeting.

Ed Robb, the Chairman of the Institute, said that the Committee "welcomes today's worldwide Christian awakening to the cause of peace. For only when the best energies of our churches are brought to bear will we overcome the fear, ignorance and political manipulation that so often have hindered or confused work in this crucial field."

Robb cautioned against any presumption that the debate about peace and disarmament can be seen as a debate between good and evil, Christian and un-Christian. "In this discussion," he argued, "what matters most is not a person's intentions. What matter are the likely consequences of the positions that are put forward. These have to be weighed very carefully indeed, because even when we mean to do right, we could invite catastrophe."

According to Robb, the Institute will be making available a packet of materials to concerned churchgoers which will explain the major positions in the dialogue about peace and disarmament and some of the historical context from which those positions have developed. The Institute will also commission a study guide to these materials, to help the reader evaluate the facts, analysis, and policy implications of each of the major positions. This packet, which should be ready soon, can be purchased from the Institute for \$2.50.

Among the questions that the Institute materials will address will be:

Has the traditional Christian teaching on "justifiable war" been made obsolete by nuclear

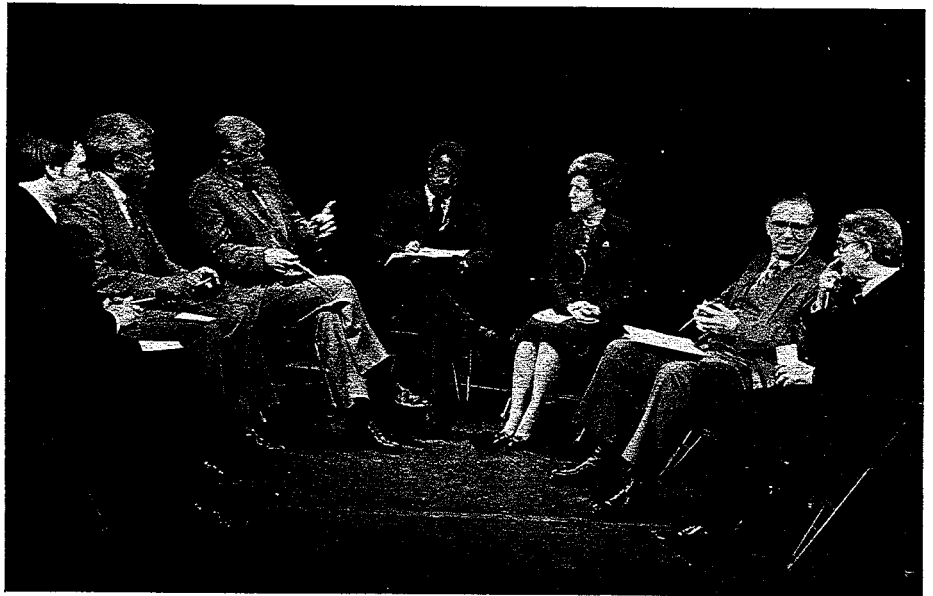
weapons? If so, are there moral alternatives to unilateral disarmament or pacifism?

Is there a serious military threat to the democratic world from the Soviet Union? Has the Soviet Union embarked on a dangerous arms build-up? Is there really an arms race?

What are the dangers of a U.S. military build-up? And what are the dangers of unilateral measures toward disarmament?

How can arms control agreements be monitored, and how can we be sure that they are being kept?

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IRD members and Board of Global Ministries representatives face off at a TV taping. From left to right: David Jessup (IRD), James Lawson (BGM), Ed Robb (IRD), Harry Johnson (moderator), Ruth Daugherty (BGM), Ira Gallaway (IRD), and Bishop James Ault (BGM).

IRD Dialogue with Church Leaders

Institute leaders have been invited recently to discuss their differences, including church support for undemocratic political movements, with mainline church representatives in three important forums.

On March 14, three IRD Executive Committee members will appear on the United Methodist television program "Spotlight on Mission," to be broadcast over the Satellite Program Network, a cable television outlet.

The program, a discussion between the IRD leaders and three representatives of the U.M. Board of Global Ministries, was taped in New York in February. It turned out to be a lively discussion about the Board's and the IRD's differing philosophies of mission.

Another United Methodist body has voted to begin a more formal dialogue with the IRD. The Joint Panel on International Affairs, made

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Briefs

For the first time in several years, a clear and sharp opposition is developing between supporters of El Salvador's guerilla insurgency and the Catholic Church, in El Salvador and world-wide. The Catholic Church is enthusiastically urging support for El Salvador's March 28th elections. The guerilla forces not only are boycotting the elections, they are openly planning to discredit them through violence and intimidation. The Salvadoran Catholic bishops have called on all Salvadorans to participate in the balloting, and publicly have lamented the fact that "some of our brothers have rejected them."

On February 28 Pope John Paul II, speaking at the Vatican, gave strong endorsement to the position of the Salvadoran bishops. According to a dispatch by Father Kenneth Doyle for the National Catholic News Service, "The Pope said that he was making his own the February 17th appeal of the Salvadoran bishops, who said that the nation's problems should be solved by the nation's people, and that elections were the best way to end the violence." So far most U.S. critics of the Reagan Administration's policy in El Salvador have belittled the elections as "meaningless". It will be interesting to see whether the new stand of the Catholic Church has any influence with them.

From a recent mailing from Lucius Walker, Jr., Director of the Inter-religious Foundation for Community Organizations — a group financed by grants from mainline Protestant denominations:

We are counting on you to defeat the return of "Jim Crow", which Ronald Reagan, Jerry Falwell, Jesse Helms, Jeremiah Denton, Bill Wilkinson, Thomas Sowell and their gang of far right-wing Terrorists are pushing. Together we can stop their plan to kill Black People and their destruction of the social progress made since World War II.

So Rev. Walker admits that we have made social progress since World War II, does he? Could he

be slipping toward neo-conservatism?

Two United Methodist agencies have cut their formal ties with the continuation committee of a conference on Southern Africa which had participation from many pro-Soviet groups. The U.M. Board of Global Ministries and Board of Church and Society were evidently responding to the storm of protest which erupted last October when The United Methodist Reporter publicized that the boards had given substantial money and staff support to the conference, even though it was controlled by pro-Soviet organizations. It is not clear, however, that despite this formal break the agencies will end their informal cooperation with groups which are closely involved with pro-Communist guerillas in Southern Africa.

The Fellowship of Prayer, a book of devotionals for Lent prepared for use in the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), offers this for March 13th:

Commune - ism

In 1949, Mao Zedong, with both Christian and Marxist influence in his background, attempted to institute this vision in the People's Republic of China, and with remarkable success.... Where only a generation ago there was rampant starvation, disease and illiteracy, it was a miracle that no one was hungry. Everyone had a job. Everyone had health care. And children had seven to nine years of free public education....

Prayer: We thank you, God, for precious fruits of the Gospel, especially when they come incognito. Amen.

Very incognito.

The IRD is expanding its staff to include a Director of Organization and Membership. Diane Knippers, formerly associate executive secretary of the unofficial United Methodist evangelical caucus Good News, joined the Institute staff March 1. Her principle responsibilities will be membership recruitment and the education and training of Institute members and supporters. The first

IRD seminar is planned for Seattle on April 14.

Stedman Fagoth, leader of Nicaragua's Miskito Indian tribe, visited Washington in February to report the brutal treatment of his people by the Sandinista government. Miskito leaders, he recounted, have been arrested, and in some cases tortured and executed. The Moravian Church, to which the Miskitos belong, is being harshly persecuted.

The following literature on the role of the churches in society is available from the IRD:

1) Christianity and Democracy - \$1.50

The guiding statement of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, which sets forward the theological and social argument for a stronger Christian commitment to democratic values.

2) The Catholic Church in El Salvador - \$1.50

A definitive description of the position of the Salvadoran Church, which clearly establishes the Church's opposition to violence and repression including that of the Marxist-Leninist left.

3) Must Walls Confuse? - \$1.50

A critical review of the 1981 Summer mission text of the National Council of Churches, which argues that American churches should be more critical of religious repression in the Soviet bloc.

4) Nicaragua: A Revolution Against the Church? - \$1.50

A review of the growing assault on liberty by Nicaragua's Sandinistas, and the courageous role of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church.

To order any of these materials, please send the appropriate amount to the IRD at the address below.

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You are invited to become a member of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. Membership dues are \$25.00 a year. Contributions in any amount are welcome.

The Poland Watch

An IRD survey in mid-January found that at that date -- a full month after the military coup -- the American churches for the most part seemed curiously quiet about the social and spiritual dimensions of the Polish tragedy, although they were sending material aid. But since our last issue a number of church leaders have spoken out.

Some of the statements of the past month are straightforward and quite possibly effective protests against the new Polish regime. Others are more interesting for what they reveal about the political ideology that still burdens so many of the mainline Protestant denominations.

The Lutheran Response

Bishop David W. Preuss of The American Lutheran Church made his own statement about the "violence and curtailment of freedom" in Poland on December 29, 1981 -- a statement that, as his office was good enough to point out, our survey missed. On January 20 Bishop Preuss was joined by leaders of three other Lutheran churches -- the Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches -- in a vigorous call to end martial law and release all detainees.

The Executive Committee of the Council of United Methodist Bishops made an equally firm protest on January 28. "The imposition of martial law, the muzzling of the media, the manipulation of food distribution, the crackdown on the Solidarity union, the curbs on the Catholic Church are examples of totalitarian excesses," the Bishops declared.

Statements have also been made by United Presbyterian leaders and by Rev. Kenneth L. Teegarden, chief executive officer of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). According to a release by the Disciples News Service, Rev. Teegarden declared that "martial law is a fundamental violation of human rights." The United Presbyterian leaders spoke of their "concern for the people of Poland and our brothers and sisters in Christ who struggle there to gain and preserve their full liberties."

Poland and El Salvador

Among the most interesting statements on the Polish crisis have been those of the National Council of Churches. In a press release of January 19 -- evidently the first NCC statement on the issue -- NCC president Bishop James Armstrong dwelt heavily on the "striking similarities" between Poland and El Salvador.

This is a line of argument that the IRD believes should be examined closely. How similar, really, are the situations in Poland and El Salvador? Both countries are shaken by brutality, and suffer serious forms of repression. But the differences are perhaps more significant than the similarities.

- * El Salvador does have very active free labor unions, which petition the government, participate in politics, and may strike. No longer true in Poland.

- * El Salvador has elections scheduled for March 28, and independent parties are competing in them. Intimidation by the military and the guerillas seriously limits democratic participation, but it exists, and is growing. In Poland, no.
- * El Salvador retains considerable freedom of movement, freedom of personal communication, and other characteristics of free societies. Poland is under rigid martial law. (A guerilla movement is possible in El Salvador, not in Poland.)

Eastern European Security

On January 21 the Division of Overseas Ministries of the NCC adopted a statement on Poland that is more perplexing than Bishop Armstrong's. Their statement does "deplore the suspensions of civil and political liberties" and condemns martial law. But then it declares that "the internal crisis in Poland is complicated by the role Poland must play in the military security system of Eastern Europe."

The NCC adds: "As U.S. Christians, we call upon our government not to use Poland as a pawn in our superpower conflicts with the Soviet Union. The chief consideration of all our national responses should be the welfare of the Polish people at this fateful moment and we would view the imposition of further U.S. sanctions as contradictory to such consideration."

- * But "must" Poland really play the role the Soviets assign it in their military security system?
- * Is the problem really that the U.S. government wants to use Poland as a pawn in superpower conflicts? (Nowhere does the NCC criticize the Soviet Union for its role in Polish events.)
- * Would the Polish people really be helped if the West refused to impose any sanctions on the Polish government? (Is the NCC here uncharacteristically siding with our banks and multinational corporations?)

In all, the Polish crisis is proving to be an important test for America's churches. Some are now responding with clarity and strength. Others seem to be revealing a serious moral and intellectual confusion.

If some American Protestant churches are confused, what word describes the state of mind of the World Council of Churches? In mid-February a four person delegation to Poland from the WCC met with General Jaruzelski, and reported he would probably lift martial law restrictions by the end of the month. Soon after, he arrested several thousand more detainees.

According to a WCC news release, their delegation to Poland gave this report on the mood of the country: "It seems that martial law is generally accepted as a painful necessity... the lesser evil." The release continues: "Detention conditions are described as not good in the beginning, but now good in most of the 16 centers." The WCC team made seven recommendations: none of them speaks of the need for the churches to bring pressure to bear on the Polish or Soviet governments.

Peace

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Today an old argument is revived: whether survival should be bought at the price of liberty. What practical alternatives are there that will make it likely that we will neither be "red nor dead?"

How can Christians help to rebuild the international processes and institutions which can contain conflicts which might otherwise lead to war?

How can Christians in open societies give voice to the desire for peace and disarmament which is shared by our brothers and sisters in closed societies?

Robb explained that there is a close relation between the quest for peace and the desire to strengthen democratic institutions worldwide -- the founding purpose of the Institute. "The search for peace is more than an attempt to do away with weapons of war. It is also a search for means through which men can resolve conflicts through free consent, according to accepted law or procedure. No serious peace movement today can fail to address the fact that the U.N. Charter, which pledges nations to abjure 'the threat or use of force', is today being violated in many parts of the world."

Dialogue

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up of top staffers from the U.M. mission and social action agencies, voted in February to conduct a "family discussion" with the United Methodist members of the Institute leadership. Though no timetable was established for the talks, the Panel assigned a committee to organize the effort.

On March 24, IRD Executive Committee members Richard John Neuhaus and Edmund Robb will participate in a dialogue sponsored by the National Council of Churches. William Day, Assistant General Secretary for Information, explained the reason for the invitation: "We want to discuss directly the criti-

cisms you may have concerning the approaches of the NCCC and the mainline denominations."

Speaking for the NCC and the mainline churches will be Bishop James Armstrong, a United Methodist minister who is president of the NCC, and Arie Brouwer, Chief Executive of the Reformed Church in America. The newly formed Information Committee of the NCC will be the host of the discussion. The invitation to the IRD described the dialogue as "our sincere effort to hear your concern."

These three discussions mark a considerable change in the approach of mainline church officials to the IRD. Only last summer three agen-

IRD SPEAKS ON SOUTH AFRICA

The IRD Executive Committee has adopted a policy statement on the continuing crisis of South Africa which "notes with dismay that racism and the repression of those who seek a brotherhood of peoples continue undiminished in the Republic of South Africa." The Committee urged consideration of the analysis and policy recommendations in the study "South Africa: Time Running Out," sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. It added that, "In our view, particular stress must be given to the development of pro-democratic, non-violent alternatives to the regime of apartheid." For more information on the Rockefeller Study or a full text of the IRD Statement please write the IRD office.

cies of the United Methodist Church and United Church of Christ paid \$6,000 to outside researchers to conduct a secret investigation of the IRD and to publish a defamatory report about the organization. No Institute officials were themselves interviewed during the preparation of that report.

But the product of that effort -- as one writer put it -- "proved the Institute to be almost embarrassingly respectable." Perhaps mainline church leaders are now beginning to realize that strong criticism can sometimes come from those who truly wish to build the churches. If dialogue can be conducted on these terms, it should be interesting -- and productive.

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