

SOVIET TECHNOLOGICAL MAN SPEAKS: THE ENEMY IS EVERYWHERE

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Since the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in the late summer of 1968 hopes for détente between East and West have ebbed. The ruthless suppression of internal political autonomy in that often overrun nation seems to have given the lie to all those who have asserted that under the common pressures of modern industrialized society the social systems of the United States and the Soviet Union were becoming more and more alike. The use of the naked force of the Red Army to destroy the Czech road to socialism has left in ruin not only immediate aspirations for a reduction of international tensions in Central Europe but the broader faith in a future peace based on a convergence of the democratic and the Communist ways of life.

Yet the reaction of anger and despair engendered by the movement of Soviet tanks into Prague reflects the tendency of Western observers — Americans especially — to assess international political developments in overly short-run terms, and is the obverse of the belief (often held by the same people) that Soviet adherence to the test ban treaty was a sure sign that suddenly the millennium of a peaceful world was at hand. Unless a great power is subjected to violent revolution which overturns its internal social structure (an event which is rare indeed), it changes its foreign policies only in glacial fashion and in response to deep and often hidden tides of history. Looked at in calmer perspective, both such agreement as may be forged between the Soviet Union and the United States relative to arms control and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (which after all enjoyed tacit American consent) can be seen as two indications of the recognition of the great powers that the present world balance of power is too precarious to be tampered with and that its maintenance must be an overriding concern of sensible men.

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One unfortunate consequence of the chill in East-West relations caused by the invasion of Czechoslovakia has been the lack of adequate attention given to one of the most interesting, and in the long run most significant, developments of the months preceding the invasion — the appearance of the essay by the noted Soviet physicist Andrei D. Sakharov on "Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom." Widely circulated among Soviet intellectuals prior to its publication in full by the *New York Times* in July, 1968, it can tell us much not only about the future of Soviet-Western relations in the narrow area of international politics but also about the future of the human race itself. Sakharov's essay has been severely criticized by establishment intellectuals in the Soviet Union, especially since the tightening of internal controls attendant upon the Czech crisis, but so far his scientific eminence (he is often referred to as the "father of the Soviet H-bomb") has protected him from serious reprisals for his indiscretion, and undoubtedly many of his colleagues among the Soviet technical elite share his views.

The greatest mistake Westerners could make would be to assess Sakharov's work simply in terms of "cold war" internal politics. Its real importance lies in the fact that he addresses himself to problems of common concern to foresighted human beings on both sides of the "iron curtain." His is the first major manifesto on behalf of technological man issuing from within Soviet society, but it speaks to and for all who recognize that recent technological developments giving mankind virtually absolute control over nature make mandatory the creation of a new civilization capable of controlling them. Sakharov is no hidden friend of the West laboring under Communist tyranny. His message is not that we have allies behind the iron curtain but rather that the enemy is everywhere.

Sakharov recognizes, as any serious student of the contemporary human condition must, that our problems are twofold: the immediate and urgent life or death ones posed by nuclear weapons in the hands of rival imperialist powers — problems exaggerated by the lack of internal political and intellectual freedom in the Soviet Union; and the longer range but no less urgent and mortal ones posed by world poverty, over-

population and the destruction of man's natural environment by uncontrolled technology. Our ability to deal with the latter is in large measure (as he realizes) threatened by our preoccupation with the former — as when nuclear fallout poisons the air we breathe — and we can resolve our crisis as a species only through joint action of the great powers whose political contention has done much to aggravate them. Only by transcending the East-West conflict through coexistence can we resolve the deeper human crisis created by technological progress.

Specifically what does Sakharov see as the problem of today and tomorrow? What measures does he suggest to solve them? How accurate is his diagnosis and how feasible are his remedies? Harrison Salisbury in his introduction, notes and epilogue to the *New York Times* sponsored hard-cover publication of Sakharov's essay (Norton, \$3.95) does his best to illuminate some of these questions, but unfortunately he is so preoccupied by the internal Soviet and international political background of Sakharov's essay that he tends to treat it primarily as another piece of raw material for the Kremlinologist, rather than as an intrinsically important statement about the human condition, addressed to emerging technological man everywhere, whose author simply happens to be a Soviet citizen rather than an American. (This attitude toward the significance of Sakharov's testament is even more clearcut in the distressingly puerile comment of Presidential advisor Henry Kissinger quoted on the book's jacket: "The Sakharov document is a deeply moving testimony to the freedom of the human spirit. It is therefore one of the most important documents on Communist affairs of recent years." (Unfortunately, at present the future of the race is in the hands of apparatchiks such as Kissinger on both sides of the iron curtain.)

Part of the difficulty of focusing on what is more important in Sakharov's ideas lies in the essay itself since its author is of course speaking to his fellow Soviet citizens and is so concerned about the dangers posed to Soviet technological man by the police state and the loss of intellectual freedom that his own priorities of interest and exposition become somewhat distorted. But he is clear that the need for freedom within the USSR exists in the last analysis because only when freed can Soviet scientists do their share in saving mankind from the general perils which threaten the human future.

Sakharov speaks with authority on nuclear weapons. Nuclear warfare is suicidal. There is no possibility of a nation effectively defending itself

against nuclear attack or counterattack. Anti-missile systems are of no real use, they can only serve to upset the balance of power in the short run, and a moratorium on their construction would be valuable as an earnest that the present balance of terror on which world peace rests would be maintained while long-run disarmament was being instituted. Sakharov does not attempt to deal at any length with particular international political problems as such. He condemns American intervention in Vietnam and — writing before Prague of course — balances this with condemnation of Soviet adventurism in the Middle East (Cuba is not mentioned). But the examples are secondary to his feeling that both powers are at fault and peace can be secured only by the cessation of attempts to export either revolution or counterrevolution. He is careful to note also that the great attention he gives to condemning tyranny in the Soviet Union does not mean that he feels the West is exempt from political censure: progressives in the West are fighting capitalist egoism and excesses there, he and his fellows must fight their own enemies on their home ground.

Not only police state methods as such threaten intellectual freedom but mass culture, bureaucratized dogmatism, authoritarian education, and mass myths spread by demagogues are the common enemies of humanity on both sides of the iron curtain. Perhaps Sakharov exaggerates the extent to which the West is a prey of mass culture — a thesis he has evidently picked up from reading Western intellectuals — and perhaps he minimizes the significance of the fact that the full sanctions of governmental power lie behind conventional stupidity in the Soviet Union, but whatever the comparative situation may in fact be, certainly Westerners can agree that intellectual conformism is a worldwide threat.

Curiously — and significantly — Sakharov is not much interested in economics as such. He takes the position — rank heresy for a Soviet intellectual — that capitalism and socialism have fought to an economic draw, not only in the struggle to produce high living standards in their respective heartlands, but also in respect to the way in which wealth is distributed among their populations. Both the Soviet Union and the United States, he argues — and he is essentially correct — have similar social structures when measured in economic terms. While he looks forward to more equality, popular participation in decision making, and flexibility in the economic structures of both East and West in the future, he has nothing much to offer in the way of specific proposals. Though, in the future, competition between capitalism and socialism is to be on the "moral" plane rather than

the economic, he is vague as to what the norm for judging relative success might be. Clearly Sakharov envisions a future convergence of capitalism and socialism in some kind of mixed economy where traditional economic questions will be of little importance.

Much more important in Sakharov's perspective, and rightly so, are basic ecological issues. He admits the tentativeness of his formulations in the area of population problems, and never escapes the basic Communist aversion to neo-Malthusianism. But although he holds that not the export of birth control but economic assistance is the basic solution to what he recognizes as the rapidly worsening plight of the so-called developing nations, he states that both developed and underdeveloped nations must control their birth rates, and that "mankind must look upon itself in a demographic sense as a unit." Though not wishing to curtail scientific progress, he is concerned with dangers to freedom and to "basic human values and to the meaning of life" in the misuse of technical and biochemical methods and the methods of mass psychology." He has read his *Brave New World* and learned its lessons well. At the same time he fully recognizes what many who worry about the impact of technology on human life fail to see, that only through the conscious social control of technological development based on scientific knowledge of the consequences of change can the dangers inherent in new discoveries be averted. Pollution of the environment including the destruction of the earth's atmosphere through rising temperatures — a real threat for the not too distant future — misuse of anti-biotics, simple suffocation in our own waste products, these dangers he holds can only be overcome by geohygenic legislation and control on a worldwide basis. Thus — and this is the central insight and lesson of his whole essay — coexistence between the Soviet Union and the United States is necessary not only to save the world from destruction by nuclear war but to save the human race from destruction through the long-run effects of uncontrolled technology.

When Sakharov sets forth his four-stage plan for international cooperation to avert the dangers he perceives, we come to realize even more clearly how formidable these dangers are and to what extent the irrational and unnecessary East-West conflict gets in the way of our addressing ourselves to our real problems as human beings. The first step to human salvation (Sakharov has a timetable for the future but the actual dates are arbitrary and unimportant) would be a movement within the socialist nations toward what would be in essence multi-party systems; Prague is probably the grave of that hope for the

next decade. His second stage envisions the victory of liberal and leftist reformers within the bourgeois nations followed by social changes leading to increased cooperation and convergence with the socialist states; the increase of racism, black and white alike, especially in the United States, and the intellectual bankruptcy of the liberal Left in the West makes such victory almost as unlikely for the near future as a victory for political freedom in the Soviet Union. In the third phase of Sakharov's plan, the Soviet Union and the United States would tax themselves twenty per cent of their national incomes in order to aid the underdeveloped world; but this would represent a sharp reversal of current trends, for both East and West are presently downgrading foreign aid. Finally, the period 1980-2000 will initiate the era of full social convergence, of world government, and of vast scientific progress. In this era the law of international geohygiene can take effect so that the world can save itself from the otherwise inevitable evil consequences of the unbridled power bestowed on humanity by science and technology.

Utopian? Of course. But as a leading American scientist recently wrote, the world is rapidly becoming too dangerous for anything but utopias. What stands in the way of salvation is above all not a failure of political policies and mechanisms but of ideas. Sakharov at the outset of his essay calls for use of the scientific method to deal with human problems, hence the need for intellectual freedom. Many who construe scientific method narrowly will regard this as trite and childish, or even argue that science by destroying the irrational and affective has created the mess we are in, or that science is nothing but ancient dogmatism and superstition in new and fancy dress.

Sakharov and the growing number who are his counterparts throughout the world obviously view science as a wider commitment. For emerging technological man, science means above all a commitment to the realities of existence as observed by men — human realities as well as "material" ones — and the impulse that moves Sakharov to fight Soviet tyranny is not alien to that which, however perverted by passion and ignorance, moves students and others to protest irrational and rigidified structures throughout the world. What Sakharov really asks us to do is to "come alive" and to fight the enemies of life on both sides of the political boundary that seemingly divides the world. His call to arms not only issues from a deeply moral imperative but, since, in the last analysis, values and facts are reflections of one underlying reality, it also tells us what we must do as the price of simple physical survival as a species.