

political life in the Soviet Union. Their number is insignificant, and recently, owing both to forced emigration and to numerous arrests, it has dwindled even further. Their influence among the Soviet people is negligible – indeed, they are less well known in their own country than in the West. By themselves, the dissidents will not be able to change the political system of the U.S.S.R.

Our capacity to assist the dissidents, moreover, is restricted. Too close a Western identification with the human-rights activists would be counter-productive. It would evoke the atavistic Soviet resentment, aggravated by the Communist propaganda, against foreign influence and would alienate the dissidents even further from their own society. It could also antagonize many reform-minded people, who, unlike the dissidents, prefer to advance their goals within the existing system. The situation was aptly summed up by Roy Medvedev. *Détente*, he argued, though extremely important, is only one element advancing the process of democratization in the Soviet Union. In the final analysis, the problems of any country, and especially of a great power such as the U.S.S.R., must be resolved by its own people.

Dissidents

We cannot introduce democracy into the Soviet Union for the dissidents, but we cannot withhold our sympathy and support from them either. We should not be true to ourselves were we to abandon the people who, with great tenacity, uphold the principles in which we believe. Fortunately, this is not an either-or proposition. The progress of *détente* and the observance of human rights are not identical, but they are also not contradictory, and in some respects they even complement each other. We should consciously and persistently strive to relate them as closely as possible. Provided its limitations are carefully observed, *détente* could and should be used to advance the cause of personal freedom.

Détente takes precedence over personal freedom, not only because it reduces the danger of nuclear war but also because, as an astute Swedish observer, Karl Birnbaum, noted in the July 1977 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, it represents a precondition for the improvement of the human-rights situation in the East. A return to the Cold War and the renewed isolation of the U.S.S.R. from the West would eliminate even those few opportunities to help the dissidents that are available to us today. Conversely, in the conditions of a continued *détente*, with our lines of communication to Moscow open and a modicum of mutual trust created by reduced military tension, the possibility that

our concern for personal freedom will be heeded in the East should be enhanced.

In recent years, modest but tangible progress toward the linking of *détente* and human rights has already been made. However slowly and grudgingly, the Soviet leaders have accepted the fact that a connection does exist between the two. In response to pressure from Washington and Bonn, though they still refuse to acknowledge the link formally, they have eased the emigration from the U.S.S.R. of the Jews and the ethnic Germans. At Helsinki they solemnly conceded that the behaviour of governments towards their own subjects was a matter of legitimate international concern. That the Helsinki Declaration has been at least partly effective is best evidenced by a volte-face in its appraisal by the dissidents themselves. When it was signed in 1975, they expressed a great deal of scepticism, and some of them even described Helsinki as a "second Munich". Yet, as the meeting in Belgrade approached, the human-rights activists shifted their stand and recognized it – even to the point of exaggerating its significance – as a useful international forum where their grievances could be aired.

The Western pressure has been persistent but cautious. It has stopped short of anything that would damage East-West *détente*. The frontal demands on the U.S.S.R., such as the unsuccessful attempt in 1974 to link the emigration of Jews to the expansion of Soviet-American trade, have been rare. Despite the Carter Administration's strong commitment to human rights, the performance of the U.S. delegation at the Belgrade Conference was low-key. Any connection between expansion of personal freedoms and the progress of SALT II has been explicitly denied. Washington's posture *vis-à-vis* Moscow seems to be deliberate. The Americans are apprehensive about the coming changes, which will also mark a generation turnover, in the Kremlin. They are anxious to establish an early *rapprochement* with the younger Soviet leaders and to encourage them to move in the direction of external, as well as internal, moderation.

The issue of human rights has by now become an integral part of East-West relations. It is, of course, possible, that the new generation of Soviet leaders might decide to move not in the direction of moderation but of militancy. Intensified repression at home would have an adverse impact on Moscow's relations with the Western countries, and it might even prove detrimental to the achievement of the minimum goals of *détente*. Popular pressure in the United States, regardless of the stand taken by the Executive, might prevent the ratification of SALT

*Precondition
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