

The Zhukov File

An exchange of open letters with the Soviet Peace Committee

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The first Convention for European Nuclear Disarmament met in Brussels in 1982. Preparations for the second Convention, to be held in Berlin in May 1983, were under way when Mr Yuri Zhukov of the Soviet Peace Committee sent an open letter to all European Peace Movements. Ken Coates replied on behalf of the Russell Foundation. Both letters are reproduced in full.

I

The Soviet Peace Committee Criticises

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Dear Friends,

In our time as never before there is a need for a dialogue and mutual understanding among different peace forces.

We would like to share with you quite frankly some considerations about the prospects of the further development of the anti-war movement. We are prompted to do so by the disturbing development of the international situation.

The doctrine of a 'crusade' against the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries taken up as the official creed by the present US administration leads, in practical terms, not only to a direct confrontation in the political, ideological and economic spheres. The leaders of the USA and Nato openly proclaim plans of nuclear warfare.

In Europe, in spite of the arms limitation talks currently held, preparations are under way for deploying a new generation of US nuclear missiles. Evidence has come up to the effect that three to four times as many Pershing II and cruise missiles as were envisaged by Nato's 'double decision' of 1979 are being prepared for stationing. Moreover, the USA is intent on deploying Pershing II missiles, cruise missiles with nuclear warheads, and neutron weapons on the territory of Israel.

We believe the year 1983 when the deployment of US missiles in Western Europe is planned to begin to be especially important and in a sense crucial to the struggle for preventing this threat to peace and European security. And this is not just our view. More and more people in the West and in the East are becoming aware of the obvious truth that the dangerous

international developments can only be stopped by joint and resolute mass actions of all those who are committed to peace. The anti-war movement everywhere is growing in strength and width and becoming an important factor of international politics, one that has to be heeded by all political parties and governments.

Yet, it is impossible to ignore the fact that there is a sharp increase in the actions by the opponents of peace forces, trying hard to neutralise the anti-war movement, disorientate the people in the movement and push them off the right way.

So far the peace champions of the various streams, movements and organisations both in the West and East have been coming out together for peace and disarmament, laying aside their ideological differences, however serious they might be. It is easy to see how much weaker their combined efforts would be if the anti-war movements were to set those differences as lines of demarcation between themselves, breeding enmity.

In this context one cannot but feel concerned about the discussions imposed by some persons and groups in order to eventually split the anti-war movement which is global by its nature and to infiltrate the 'cold war' elements into it. The promoters of those discussions increasingly strive to turn anti-war forums into an arena of open ideological struggle by replacing the discussion of the major task of preventing nuclear war, a task that united all, with debates on issues that have nothing to do with this task.

In this connection we would like to share with you our impressions of the Convention for European Nuclear Disarmament that was held in Brussels last July on the initiative of the Bertrand Russell Foundation and the so-called Movement for European Nuclear Disarmament (END). Its organisers claim that the purpose of this event was to 'rally the broad forces and groups within the mass anti-war movement on the basis of a wide discussion providing the groundwork for fruitful co-operation'. This concept of co-operation among the peace forces in Europe can only be welcomed. However, the deliberations and the outcome of the Brussels Convention have shown that the true objective of its sponsors was not to rally but to disunite the anti-war movements.

Prior to the Convention a lengthy discussion took place among its sponsors as to whether they should invite representatives of the public organisations of the socialist countries. Finally the participation issue was resolved so that the right to take part in the conference was granted not to the real mass peace movements of the socialist countries but to a group of people who have left their countries and have nothing in common with the struggle for peace and who, while representing nobody, are busy disseminating hostile slanderous fabrications about the foreign and home policies of their former motherland. Only as an exception were some representatives of Yugoslavia, Romania and Hungary allowed to attend.

As a result the Convention was a West European rather than a European operation for all its sponsors' insistence on the latter. This was the start of overt actions aimed at disuniting the anti-war movement in Europe.

These actions have caused perplexity and protests among many participants in the Convention. Indeed, one can hardly seriously believe that the struggle for

peace and security in Europe can be successfully pursued without the participation of millions of people living in Europe's socialist countries. Whatever may be claimed by the organisers of the Convention on this score, they actually make an attempt to isolate the West European anti-war movements and organisations from the real mass movements of peace champions in the socialist countries and to substitute them by certain individuals passed off as allies who are active not in the struggle for détente and disarmament but in undermining the socialist system.

The Convention is known to have been held under the slogan of achieving European nuclear disarmament. It is also known that the only nuclear power which has made an official statement that it stands for elimination of all nuclear weapons from the whole European continent is the Soviet Union. Naturally the Soviet public organisations as well as all candid peace champions abroad welcome and support this stand. And yet there are people who try to practise discrimination against these organisations describing them as 'official' and 'dependent' on the grounds that they support the peace policy of their government.

We, as many other people, now query what are these people actually striving for – the elimination of nuclear weapons or rather the elimination of a united universal anti-war movement, the participation in which is determined both in the West and East not by anti or 'pro-government' stands but by its anti-militarist, anti-war positions.

It is a truly monstrous design to try and use the banner of peace in order to draw the anti-war movement into what is to all intents and purposes a 'cold war' against the public in socialist countries and to lead them along this path to the impasse of anti-Sovietism and anti-communism. These actions cannot be justified by the assertions of the Convention organisers that they wish to be 'neutral' to both 'superpowers' and strive to be equally removed from their foreign policies.

At present active preparations are known to be under way for the second Convention to be held in West Berlin in May 1983. We have hoped that its organisers would have analysed all negative aspects of the Brussels meeting and come up with a different, more democratic, politically balanced and responsible approach. In that case the Soviet public organisations which abide by the principle that co-operation must be sought among all peace forces with no exception, would have been ready to take part in the preparatory work and the deliberations of the Convention. That is why we agreed to hold consultative meetings with representatives of the West Berlin 'Working Group for a Nuclear-free Europe' who are in charge of the practical preparations for the second Convention.

We sincerely hoped that we would find, as a result of these meetings, a mutually acceptable basis for co-operation leading to a truly constructive dialogue between the peace forces representing not only the West but also the East at the Convention itself. However, contacts with the Convention organisers confirmed our worst apprehensions as to its character and orientation.

Our talks in Moscow in October 1982 with the representatives of the West Berlin 'Working Group for a Nuclear-free Europe' – J. Graalfs, W. Grunwald, G. Gumlich, T. Schweisfurth and R. Steinke – and the documents available to us made us quite

certain that things boil down to a deliberate attempt to distract the attention of the peace-loving public away from the main source of deadly peril to the European nations, viz. plans to deploy a new generation of nuclear missiles in Western Europe in 1983. It has become obvious that the issue of a nuclear-free Europe is largely a rubber-stamp measure put on the agenda as a concession to the demands of really mass anti-war organisations working against the deployment of new US missiles.

The assertion of the organisers of the West Berlin Convention that they are intent on forming an 'anti-bloc' movement for 'equal responsibility of both blocs and above all, the USA and USSR, does not hold water. They wilfully elude any concrete analysis of the policies of certain states and hush up a well-known fact that the Warsaw Treaty Organisation has repeatedly made an official proposal to simultaneously dissolve both blocs and as for Nato leaders, they are reluctant even to discuss the matter.

The leaders of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and the Movement for European Nuclear Disarmament somehow keep silent about the following significant fact. In a well-known Appeal for European Nuclear Disarmament of 28 April 1980, which is put forward as a political platform of the Convention, the authors have stated that both sides, i.e. the East and West, bear the equal blame and along with this they have appealed to the USA and USSR to remove all nuclear weapons from the European soil and specifically demanded that the USSR stop the production of Soviet medium-range SS20 missiles and the USA abandon its decision to deploy Pershing II and cruise missiles in Western Europe. They also appealed to both powers to ratify SALT II.

Since the publication of the Appeal the positions of the USSR and USA towards these demands have become definite. The USSR, as it has been mentioned, has come forward with a proposal of a real 'zero option' – to eliminate both medium-range weapons and tactical nuclear weapons from the European territory. It has stopped the stationing of medium-range missiles capable of hitting targets in Europe and even started a unilateral reduction of their quantity. The USSR has always been for the ratification and implementation of SALT II. Finally, the USSR has come out with a historic initiative pledging a unilateral obligation of non-use of nuclear weapons first.

However, the USA has taken an entirely opposite stand on all these issues, rejecting all the demands of the peace forces.

The leaders of the Bertrand Russell Foundation and the Movement for European Nuclear Disarmament make it appear that they are unaware of these facts and keep foisting on others their concept of 'equal responsibility'. We are firmly convinced that this concept is aimed at the disorientation, demobilisation and undermining of the anti-war movement and is called upon to conceal and justify an aggressive militarist policy of the USA and Nato.

It has become known that the organisers plan to bring a so-called 'German question' into discussions at the Convention, thus trying to challenge the inviolability of the post-war European frontiers and to violate the letter and spirit of the Helsinki Final Act.

The only way we can regard such political manoeuvres is as an attempt to revise the well-known agreements between the Federal Republic of Germany and its neighbours and the status of West Berlin.

It is not at all coincidental that the 'Working Group' is planning to hold an international symposium in West Berlin next June on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the abortive counter-revolutionary coup staged in the GDR in 1953. What is it but an interference in the internal affairs of the GDR, and in effect a provocative attempt to force onto the anti-war movement an issue which has nothing to do with the movement for a nuclear-free Europe and resuscitates the revanchist sentiments.

We cannot agree with the anti-democratic stand taken by the organisers of the West Berlin Convention on the issue of preparation for this forum. We were told that the participation in the preparatory committee had been restricted only to those who adhere to the above Appeal incorporating a number of provisions unacceptable to many anti-war organisations, including ourselves. Moreover, as it has been shown above, some of the provisions of the Appeal are simply outdated. While clinging to this condition, the organisers of the Convention obviously try to use it for a selective approach in choosing the would-be participants among the individuals and organisations.

Answering the question of the possibility for the Peace Committees of the socialist countries to participate in the Convention, the representatives of the West Berlin 'Working Group' have evasively declared that it is practically impossible to solve this question within the framework of the Liaison Committee. How are they going to organise an East-West dialogue at the Convention? It turned out that they intended to selectively send out personal invitations to individual public figures in the socialist countries to attend in 'personal capacity' even then confining them to an observer status. This makes us certain that the Convention organisers simply fear the appearance of real opponents and therefore prefer to engage in anti-socialist propaganda in the absence of plenipotentiaries of public opinion in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

Neither can we agree with the fact that virtually all major decisions with regard to the preparations and proceedings at the Convention are taken by a limited group of people (K. Coates, L. Castellina, J. Lambert and J. Graalfs), while others are assigned the role of mute partners.

We are convinced that the orientation which the organisers try to lend to the Convention and the methods of its preparation preclude the possibility of a fruitful all-European dialogue, which would be conducive to expanding co-operation of peace forces, who hunger for it in the present menacing international situation. On the contrary, all this will contribute to fomenting a 'cold war' among the participants in the anti-war movement in Europe threatening to push this movement backwards. Naturally we shall not be a party to this wrecking undertaking.

We thought it necessary to let you know our stand with complete frankness so as to avoid misunderstanding or idle speculation. Our meetings and talks show

that many public figures and organisations both in Eastern and Western Europe share our opinion or hold similar views with regard to the Convention.

For our part, we are going to continue working towards a better mutual understanding and joint actions of the public movements in the East and in the West for our common goal, that of averting the danger of nuclear war and freeing our continent of all nuclear weapons.

Your sincerely,
Yuri Zhukov,
President, Soviet Peace Committee.

II The Russell Foundation Replies

1 February 1983

Dear Mr Zhukov,

We have just received your letter to Western Peace Movements, dated 2 December 1982. You did not send it to this Foundation, against which you raise serious complaints. We regret that you have not discussed these with us, since there are several points in which your letter errs, and which could have been clarified had you approached us. Now we are in the position of replying to an open letter, so we feel sure you will forgive us if we reply with a frankness equal to your own.

First, we must say that it is a pity that your letter so plainly contradicts the spirit of the important new initiatives taken by Mr Andropov and your Government during the past few weeks. During this time we have noted the very significant speech of 21 December, with its new offer concerning the further reduction of Soviet SS20 missiles against that of British and French equivalent weaponry. We find this entirely reasonable, and unequivocally support it. We also welcome the proposed 'no-first-use' agreement on conventional weapons, which we see as a worthwhile confidence-building measure. We further very much support the UN decision on a nuclear freeze, carried with your Government's adherence.

We also welcome new initiatives to normalise Soviet-Chinese relations. Not all, by any means, of these proposals are totally new in themselves, but as a package they give us real hope that a new policy in the USSR will re-open new and serious impulses to disarmament. In none of these matters are we your Government's critics. In fact, we think Mr Andropov has properly seized the initiative, and all pressure should be brought upon the United States and our own Government to reciprocate.

Yet, for all our hopes in this field, we still think that nonalignment is the proper course for our peace movements, and ultimately for all the European countries. This is not, as you wrongly assume, because we hold the two superpowers to be 'equally' responsible for the present state of the arms race. In fact we disagree with this view, and have frequently said so. Our main criticism has always been addressed to our own Government, against which we assert all our constitutional rights of opposition, because this is the main authority whose behaviour we may

hope to influence. Nonetheless it is our opinion that blame of different kinds does historically attach to each bloc, and we do not wish simply to exchange blocs, but to make possible a genuine, and reciprocal, exit from the entire system of bloc divisions in our continent. In no way does this aspiration threaten the reasonable interests of the USSR, or the legitimate concerns of the USA. We seek amity with both powers in a changed world in which co-operation replaces conflict and the threat of the employment of force.

1983 is a crossroads for Europe and the world, as we have said consistently. The installation of the Pershing II and cruise missiles by Nato we see as a real threat to your country, which will within the logic of the arms race bring down further threats on our heads. Escalation of this already insane arms race imperils all mankind. That is the basis of our Appeal, although you never mention it.

What is your alternative? Our Appeal concerns the peoples of that Europe which is sandwiched between yourselves and the Americans. It must attract their majority support if it is to succeed. If your offer them peace instead on the sole basis of unswerving support for your own Government's policies in every field of world affairs, how many will agree? Obviously, this will depend in part on what those policies are. In the late 1950s and early '60s, your Government won many friends, who had originally been highly suspicious of the previous regime. One of these was our founder, Bertrand Russell, who recorded the progress of his thinking in his Autobiography:

'In the late '40s and early '50s, I had been profoundly impressed by the horror of Stalin's dictatorship, which had led me to believe that there would be no easy resolution of the cold war. I later came to see that for all his ruthlessness, Stalin had been very conservative. I had assumed, like most people in the West, that his tyranny was expansionist, but later evidence made it clear that it was the West that had given him Eastern Europe as part of the spoils of the Second World War, and that, for the most part, he had kept his agreements with the West. After his death, I earnestly hoped that the world would come to see the folly and danger of living permanently in the shadow of nuclear weapons. If the contenders for world supremacy could be kept apart, perhaps the neutral nations could introduce the voice of reason into international affairs. It was a small hope, for I overestimated the power of the neutrals. Only rarely, as with Nehru in Korea, did they manage to add significant weight to pressures against the cold war.

The neutrals continued to embody my outlook, in that I consider human survival more important than ideology. But a new danger came to the fore. It became obvious that Russia no longer entertained hope of world-empire, but that this hope had now passed over to the United States. As my researches into the origins and circumstances of the war in Vietnam showed, the United States was embarking upon military adventures which increasingly replaced war with Russia as the chief threat to the world. The fanaticism of America's anti-communism, combined with its constant search for markets and raw materials, made it impossible for any serious neutral to regard America and Russia as equally dangerous to the world.'

Russell's view of Soviet policy was subsequently partially changed again, mainly by the invasion of Czechoslovakia, which did much to distance you from many over here who want peace, and also from socialists and communists in many

countries. Foreign reactions to the Soviet Union are only partly conditioned by bellicose propaganda, which is undoubtedly powerful, and from the attentions of which we suffer also. They are also formed by what your Government positively does. Now the Soviet Union is one of the major powers, not a besieged island attempting to pioneer new social forms. Paradoxically this means you can no longer rely on the uncritical support which was widely aroused in the earlier, embattled and heroic days of the foundation of your State. Today a peace movement composed of only your uncritical admirers in the West would consist of relatively few people, who would in no way constitute a force adequate to prevent the installation of cruise and Pershing II missiles, or to compel the United States and others to negotiate seriously to reverse the arms race. To fulfil these tasks, only a non-aligned movement has any hope of generating support on a wide enough scale. And the price of a non-aligned movement is that it is not aligned. The more constructively your Government is able to behave, the more such a movement will support you. The stronger it becomes, the more scope you will have for such constructive behaviour.

Thus, unless you were perversely to wish, for doctrinal reasons or whyever, to be able to act as arbitrarily and unkindly as possible, you ought to hope against hope that the non-aligned movement will grow. It is genuinely in both our interests. Not only may it help bring disarmament nearer, but it may also create more favourable conditions within which you may concentrate on your own peaceful renewal, and on carrying through safely and in optimal conditions whatever reforms you may think desirable and progressive. A non-aligned movement all over Europe, with millions of supporters, would mean that we, too, recovered a freedom of action which has been denied to us whilst our predominant modes of thought have been locked into the blocs. In what imaginable way does this threaten you? How does it 'provoke' you? As you rightly say, the Soviet Union has many times affirmed such a European perspective as its own. Why, when we assert it, and seek to give it material embodiment, does it suddenly 'divide the peace movement' and serve the interests of Nato?

Some people over here accuse us of precisely the opposite intentions. In our peace movements, as you know, there exist many different minorities, and much dissent, about some of which you are well informed. We will happily assist you to gain even fuller information, if you would like it. This dissent is our strength. It enables pacifists, socialists, church people, communists, greens and all kinds of special groups to work together, not simply, as you put it, 'laying aside' their differences, but actually celebrating those differences in common cause. Such differences will be plainly apparent, in profusion, at the Berlin Convention next May. That is why we invited you to come, to share in the experience, and to discuss with us. All of us will learn from it.

But why, then, could we not ask you to co-organise the event? Because it is organised by signatories of the April 1980 Appeal which your letter misunderstands and indeed denounces. The agenda is our agenda, an agenda of non-alignment. Whilst we have already informed you that we would welcome you

among us, you must surely appreciate that we cannot surrender our own joint control over what is our platform. Do you always expect people to agree to such conditions when you visit them? If so, your travels must be rather restricted. The fraternal delegates of the CPSU do not tell the British Labour Party Conference that they must be invited to serve on the Conference Arrangements Committee before they will come, and Soviet Trade Unions are quite willing to visit other trade union bodies without making any demands whatever upon them. Why do you believe that the Peace Movement should be an exception to this rule? Surely there is no doubt about what you would say if we requested reciprocal rights concerning the agenda of your own meetings? No, this is not a serious proposal. We are what we are, and you are what you are, and we are willing to talk if you find it useful. But if we offer you friendship, it would be friendship without subservience.

Now let me deal with detailed matters on which you are wrongly informed. Your report our discussion about Eastern European participation at Brussels, saying that we invited ‘a group of people who have left their countries and have nothing in common with the struggle for peace and who, while representing nobody, are busy disseminating hostile slanderous fabrications about the foreign and home policies of their former motherland’. Which people are these? We do not know them. We in fact invited all signatories to our Appeal. One of these is Zhores Medvedev, who was the only Russian to speak in a panel discussion. So far was he from ‘disseminating hostile slanderous fabrications’ about the USSR, that many of the European communists who were present thought he was unduly supportive of official Soviet positions. This was not our view, since we shared most of his reasoning. It is difficult to see how you could have arrived at the view expressed in your letter, had you been aware of what Dr Medvedev actually said.

‘Only as an exception’, you say, were some representatives of Yugoslavia ‘allowed to attend’. This is far from the truth. The Yugoslav League for Peace, Independence and Equality of Peoples was among the earlier signatories to our Appeal, and they participated, and will participate, as of right in all our deliberations. They honoured us by sending their immediate past President, Bogdan Osolnik, together with another member of their presidency. As the premier non-aligned peace movement in Europe, they have our deep respect. Also present were distinguished Romanian and Hungarian participants, both of whom played an active and very constructive role in the workshops they chose to attend. Ask them. If their experiences are evidence of ‘overt actions aimed at disuniting the anti-war movement’ then it would be difficult to see how to strive for peace on any basis other than one which would reduce all the European movements to miniscule proportions. Since neither we nor you want that, we had better think again.

You make much of the alleged preoccupation of our forthcoming Convention with the ‘German Question’. In fact there is no such preoccupation. The Liaison Committee has allocated one seminar amongst two dozen or so to the consideration of the issue of German Disarmament, which is raised by some

German peace activists, not as a slogan of revanchism, but as a call for the denuclearisation of both Germanies. Is this such a bad idea? If so, will the fact not become apparent in a free and open discussion? How do you imagine a mass peace movement can reach consensus about its goals without such exchanges? Concerning the meeting of 17 June of which you speak, we know nothing. Our Convention is scheduled from 9 May to 15 May. We are not involved in any subsequent gathering. If you had asked us, you would instantly have discovered this fact.

Then you go on to criticise the organisation of the Liaison Committee which organises the Convention. Here your remarks are equally ill-informed. This Committee involves nearly a hundred people from more than a score of countries. It controls the Conventions in every detail. The four joint secretaries who you name do not meet separately, have no special powers, and are charged solely with the convening of meetings. Why does all this alarm you? It is a completely transparent process, both in its unity and its diversity. If you allow yourself to feel threatened by it, you are suffering from empty phobias.

We do not wish here to exchange detailed opinions about which particular aspects of Soviet policy merit support, and which opposition. One day, we hope, we will talk about it. But we should also talk about your misperception of our own attitudes to the many wrongs done in the 'Western' part of the world. Surely you cannot have been at your desk at *Pravda* for as long as you have been without being aware of some aspects or other of our own consistent opposition to all forms of imperialism, of our efforts to assist colonial struggles for independence, or of our general defence of civil freedoms and political prisoners in countries East, West and Neutral.

Your letter does your Committee a disservice by offering such unsubtle attempts to represent us as *agents provocateurs* in the service of the Western powers. We have no doubt that you will quickly be disabused of these opinions when you begin to receive replies from those to whom you have addressed your remarks. They will provoke dismay among many of your well-wishers.

Now we begin a new year. Let us propose that instead of writing *about* each other, we write *to* each other, and see what emerges.

Yours sincerely,
Ken Coates