

PACIFIST MISSION TO MOSCOW



A Soviet plainclothes policeman jumps Steve Sumerford as he hands out leaflets (center, with beard) in Red Square with St. Basil's Cathedral and the Kremlin in the background. At right, another policeman uses an umbrella to knock down a Western reporter's camera. This is the only photo of the 20-second disarmament demonstration (largely off-camera to the left). Photo by United Press International.

Mission to Moscow

The story begins with the ill-fated Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations—held in New York in late Spring, 1978. This was the first time in the history of the UN that it had met to deal directly with the arms race. Two days before the Special Session opened more than ten thousand people rallied in its support in Hollywood Bowl and a day later, to underline the urgency of the problem, thousands demonstrated at the Trident submarine base near Seattle (nearly three hundred were arrested for civil disobedience). On May 27th, during the first week of the Special Session, 15,000 people gathered in Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza near the UN to demand action on disarmament.

There was no action. Leonid Brezhnev stayed in Moscow. And Jimmy Carter stayed in Washington. To make the situation worse and underline the contempt the U.S. felt for the Special Session, the NATO military alliance met in Washington, D.C. during the Special Session—and Carter, who could not find time to attend the first UN session on disarmament, found time to attend the NATO meeting.

NEGOTIATION IN MAY— ACTION IN JUNE

Acting on behalf of the Mobilization for Survival, WRL staff arranged for citizens' delegations to meet with the UN Missions of all the nuclear powers. Those meetings took place in May. Concerned about the failure of the United States to take any leadership on the disarmament issue, WRL organized and Mobilization for Survival sponsored the dramatic Sit-In For Survival at the U.S. Mission to the UN. The date was June 12th and more than 400 were arrested for nonviolent civil disobedience.

During the summer WRL evaluated the failure of any major power to take significant action, and recognized the need to make clear to the Soviet Union that "socialist nuclear weapons" were as dangerous to human survival as "capitalist nuclear weapons." It was decided to send a team to Moscow to demonstrate in Red Square and, to underline that this action was not anti-Soviet, but directed against all nuclear powers, to hold a simultaneous demonstration at the White House.

Operating under the code name "Midwife," plans were made by Jerry Coffin, Scott Herrick (who had been one of those who walked from San Francisco to Moscow in 1961) and Patrick Lacefield for a group of WRL members to travel to the Soviet Union, ostensibly as tourists. On the afternoon of September 1 the group left New York City on an Aeroflot jet. The team consisted of Norma Becker, (WRL's Chairwoman), Jerry Coffin, Scott Herrick, Pat Lacefield,

David McReynolds, Craig Simpson, and Steve Sumerford.

The seven were housed at the Hotel National, a lovely pre-revolutionary hotel directly facing Red Square and the Kremlin. On September 4, at 5 p.m. the seven, carrying the Russian-language banner in a hand bag, and Russian-language leaflets, arrived separately at GUM Dept. store, on one side of Red Square and immediately moved into Red Square, unfurled the banner and began handing out leaflets only a hundred yards from Lenin's tomb.

Plain clothes police, running from all directions, tore the banner down less than 30 seconds after it had been raised. (It said in Russian "USA-USSR DISARM!"). The pacifists handing out leaflets were arrested and the plain clothes agents scurried to pick up the leaflets that had been tossed high into the air. Four of the seven were taken away immediately by police. Three pacifists were left standing in the Square, their banner torn down, and they began loudly to call out "Mir Y Druzba" (Peace and Friendship) to the Russians standing in the Square until uniformed police arrived and firmly urged them to leave.

Having been warned by Western correspondents in Moscow that "at best" they would be deported immediately, and "probably" would be held in jail for some time, the "Moscow Seven" had entered Red Square with considerable fear. None of them spoke Russian. They felt, in that moment in the late afternoon as a light rain fell, very much alone. But the fears proved groundless. By 7 p.m. all seven were reunited, the police having released the four they had briefly detained. By 7:30 p.m. all seven were on

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WAR IS THE FINAL CRIME—

The Ultimate Violation of Human Rights

While Soviet and American leaders heckle each other over who is responsible for the arms race, or over who more deeply violates human rights, these two super powers move steadily closer to the brink of nuclear war. Nuclear war by accident or by the act of a politically irrational leader.

Scientists warn us that the question is not "if" nuclear war will occur *but when. And it will come if the present arms race is not reversed.* Nuclear war is the final crime. No matter how evil you may think the Soviet Union is, nothing it has done in its entire history would be as criminal, or as great a violation of human rights, as the destruction of every man, woman, and child in that nation by nuclear weapons.

The real issue is not pinning down who is responsible for the arms race. The real issue is finding out who is responsible enough to end it. **Now.**

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

One of the most frequent questions thrown at pacifists is "Why don't you go tell it to Moscow?" We could stage a demonstration in Red Square once a month and people would *still* ask us that question. The reason the pacifist movement is under attack for being "soft" on the Russians is not because we have been silent about them, but because we have been vigorous in challenging the policies of our own nation, where our taxes are collected from us (often against our will), and where we have the right to vote for officials. We *must* take some responsibility for the kind of government America has and it is our job to spend most of our time working on the problems of our own country—just as it is the job of Soviet dissidents to spend most of their time working on the problems of the Soviet Union.

But let us set the record straight. If

you believe pacifists have "never told it to the Russians," *please read this.* And if you have friends who say "sure they demonstrate here—but they haven't the guts to say the same things over there," have them read this.

SUMMER, 1951: "Paris to Moscow" Bicycle Trip—by American pacifists Dave Dellinger, Ralph DiGia, Bill Sutherland, and Art Emery, distributing leaflets in French, English, and Russian, appealing for non-violent resistance to the military machines of East and West. Refused visas to the USSR, the four war resisters illegally visited the headquarters of Soviet occupation forces in Austria and leafleted Soviet troops there.

OCTOBER 3, 1961—MOSCOW: The "San Francisco to Moscow Walk," organized by the Committee for Nonviolent Action (which later merged into War Resisters League) completed their six thousand mile walk by holding a rally in Red Square and distributing the same leaflets in Moscow (translated into

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The Des Moines Register

"Gotta keep a firm grip on these demonstrators! They get loose and no telling what kind of trouble they might cause!"



Moscow demonstrators display banner reading "USA and USSR: Disarm Now!" before leaving for the Soviet Union. From left: Jerry Coffin, Norma Becker, Scott Herrick, Craig Simpson, David McReynolds, Patrick Lacefield, and Steve Sumerford. Photo by Karl Bissinger.

... Setting the Record Straight

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Russian) that had been distributed in the United States. The leaflets called for unilateral disarmament—WRL's position. As a gesture to help ease the Cold War, the Soviet government permitted the rally in Red Square, permitted the Walkers to meet with students at Moscow University, and arranged for a tea for a delegation of women from the Walk and Mrs. Khrushchev—at which the walkers strongly urged Mrs. Khrushchev to appeal to her husband to end all Soviet nuclear tests.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1968: Teams of pacifists, including two members of War Resisters League, were sent by War Resister's International to Moscow, Budapest, Warsaw and Sofia to demonstrate in protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Robert Eaton, one of the Americans, was held three days in a Hungarian political prison before being deported. Vicki Rovere, the other American, was held overnight in Moscow and deported the next day.

OCTOBER 25-31, 1973—MOSCOW: At the World Congress of Peace Forces, members of the American delegation read a WRL-prepared statement "on Soviet Dissidents" signed by Noam Chomsky, Rev. Dan Berrigan, Dave Dellinger, Rev. Paul Mayer, David McReynolds, Grace Paley, and Sidney Peck. The pro-Soviet U.S. delegation voted 67 to 31 to censure Father Paul Mayer for making the statement public. In the meantime Grace Paley, who speaks Russian, met three times with Soviet dissidents, including Andrei Sakharov. And Maris Cakars, then editor of WIN and a member of WRL, was arrested and briefly detained for distributing in the GUM department store Russian-language copies of a *New York Times* ad urging Brezhnev to grant amnesty to political prisoners in the Soviet Bloc.

SEPTEMBER 4, 1978—MOSCOW: That action is reported in these pages.

... ALL THE WAY

This is only *part* of the record. Let us be clear why our major attention is focused on the United States. It is not simply because it is our country, our government, and our taxes that are involved. It is also because, while the War Resisters League has historically opposed political repression and militarism *in any nation—with no exceptions and no double standard*—it is impossible to equate the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, in which it is estimated less than 100 people were killed, with the ten year U.S. invasion of Vietnam, during which over a million people were killed. (Tens of thousands of Vietnamese were executed without trial under the infamous "Phoenix" program of political assassination run by William Colby—there is *nothing* in Soviet history since Stalin's death 25 years ago to compare to such a program of mass murder).

And while we have *never* accepted the theory that political dissidents should be suppressed in the Soviet Union, and have steadily spoken against the grey climate of political repression in much of the Eastern Bloc, that repression does not equal the violence, massive executions, systematic torture, and human agony that came to Chile when Nixon, Kissinger, and the CIA conspired to overthrow the democratically elected government of Allende. In Czechoslovakia it is very hard for a political dissident to make a living. In Iran—which the U.S. has armed—it is very hard for a political dissident to stay alive. There is no "neat balance" between the two great powers. While there is no question that most of us in the United States are vastly freer than people in the Soviet Bloc, it is also true that many of those who live in what we call the "Free World" are considerably *less free* than the people of Russia. Think of South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, the Dominican Republic or—in recent weeks—the hid-

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their way, escorted by Natasha, their Intourist Guide, to a Moscow night club to "continue their tour as scheduled," which called for vodka, champagne, and caviar!

The next morning the group met with the Soviet Peace Committee and for nearly three hours had intensive, frank, but friendly discussions with the leadership of the Peace Committee. At the end of the meeting, Norma Becker, speaking for the group, expressed appreciation for the willingness of the Soviet Government to permit the tour to continue as scheduled, but said the money had been raised for the demonstration, not for a pleasure trip, and the group felt uneasy about remaining longer in the Soviet Union when those who demonstrated in Washington were still held in jail there. Under these circumstances, the group felt it should not continue the tour and on the afternoon of September 5, arriving on Aeroflot, they were back in New York City—where there was an emotional reunion with their co-workers who had finally been released from jail in Washington.

Meanwhile, some thousands of miles to the West, the events of September 4 had taken a different turn. The Washington D.C. group of eleven had gotten into the tourist line at the White House and, at 10 a.m. (the same time of the Red Square action seven time zones to the East), stepped out of the line and walked onto the lawn directly in front of the White House, unfurling a banner and distributing leaflets *identical* in text to those being handed out at that instant

in Moscow.

The Secret Service was caught completely by surprise and it was several minutes before the banner was taken down and the leafleting stopped. The "Washington Eleven" were then booked and remained in jail, charged with illegal entry, for some 30 hours before being released. The Washington end of the project was pulled together by Van Zwisohn and those arrested and jailed were: Gail Bederman, Karl Bissinger, Cathy Carson, Ralph DiGia, Ed Hedemann, Warren Hoskins, Linnea Lacefield, Karen Malpede, Grace Paley, Glenn Pontier, and Van Zwisohn. As this goes to press they face a possible sentence of a year in prison and \$1,000 fine.

But the point had been made. At a cost of \$10,000—borrowed from friends of WRL—and a risk of jail, the two teams had made it clear that nuclear weapons could have no safe haven in any country—in the same way that if those weapons are ever used, none of us, anywhere will survive.

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE UN-SUNG

Lynne Coffin, Carl Rogers, Linda Geary, Mike Moran, Liz Aberman, and Martha Thomases were not part of the "official teams"—but without their hard work coordinating, handling the press, and getting the impossible done on time, the project would never have worked, and never have gotten international media coverage. *Our thanks.*



Washington protestors unfurl banner in front of the White House. From left: Van Zwisohn, Grace Paley, Ralph DiGia, Cathy Carson, Gail Bederman, Warren Hoskins, Ed Hedemann, Karen Malpede and Glenn Pontier. Also arrested, but not pictured, were Linnea Capps Lacefield and Karl Bissinger. Photo by Karl Bissinger.

eous tragedy in Nicaragua, where U.S.-armed troops killed hundreds of teenagers.

And on the matter of the arms race, where the Cold War politicians point to Soviet weapons, it is necessary to remember three historic facts. **Fact One:** the United States is the only nation which ever used nuclear weapons in war. **Fact Two:** the United States, in an effort to contain revolutionary movements after World War II, began the arms race. **Fact Three:** even today, the United

States has an overwhelming military lead when compared to the Soviet Union, (more than 9,000 strategic weapons against the Soviet Union's 4,500), and is the single largest arms supplier to other nations.

All of this explains why our *primary* focus will continue to be on the U.S. military preparations, on the economic forces that profit from militarism, and on the violations of human rights in countries controlled by the United States.

MAIL TO: War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette St., NYC 10012

HELPING PAY FOR THE MOSCOW/WASHINGTON PROJECT

Yes, I want to help pay back the \$10,000 borrowed for the Moscow/Washington Project. Enclosed is my \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Helping Pay for the Moscow/Washington Project

The money for this project did *not* come from WRL's budget. It was borrowed from friends of WRL and must be repaid by special contributions. You may have a friend who has told you "Boy, if those guys were serious they'd go to Moscow and say the same stuff they say here—and I'd pay their fare." OK—now is the time to ask that friend to help pay the \$10,000 the project cost. More important, ask if *they* are willing to say the same things *here*, which the WRL team said in Moscow!