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When 'dialogue' flows only one way

"You will ask the questions that I dictate!"

The dapper and obviously outraged black man yelling this at me, with his right index finger quivering about an inch from my nose, was Maurice Jackson, the Communist Party U.S.A.'s district organizer for the District of Columbia.

What prompted this outburst by Mr. Jackson — who later said that he is a Southerner who "believes in hospitality" — was my assertion that in the question-and-answer period that was to follow the forum he was moderating, I would ask whatever questions I wanted to ask.

Ironically, this exchange occurred this past Saturday evening at Davis House on R Street, NW, the D.C. headquarters of the American Friends Service Committee, which advertises itself as a "pleasant, non-official site" that allows for "thoughtful and sensitive discussions of issues and concerns of a wide variety and opinion."

But at this night's forum — which was sponsored by and was a fundraiser for the Communist Party's newspaper, the Daily World — there were to be no discussions that were either sensitive or thoughtful. Instead, what happened was a two-hour anti-American diatribe during which the United States was repeatedly portrayed as the focus of evil in the world.

The speakers at this get-together were Nikolay Turkatenko, Washington bureau chief of the Soviet propaganda agency TASS, which is required by the Justice Department to register as a foreign agent; Michele Tingling-Clemmons, D.C. coordinator of the "Actions for Jobs, Peace and Justice" which will be held here tomorrow, and A.C. Byrd, a member of the advisory board commission for the D.C. nuclear freeze movement.

In his excellent book "KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents," author John Barron says that "a sizable portion" of the Soviet nationals posted abroad as staff members of TASS are officers of the

LOFTON UNLEASHED

By John Lofton

KGB (the Soviet secret police) and the GRU (the Chief Intelligence Directorate of the Soviet General Staff).

In his remarks, Mr. Turkatenko criticized President Reagan for not reaching "a single important agreement" with the Soviets since he has been president. As a "journalist" (sic) who watches the arms talks in Geneva closely, he said he saw no signal from the U.S. side that shows the United States is serious about conducting negotiations.

The "problem," said Mr. Turkatenko, is that America is unwilling to discuss the "star wars" strategic defense system, which would be a non-nuclear shield designed to defend the United States from a nuclear attack. He said, with a straight face, that the arms race is "a great burden." And he quoted Karl Marx as having said that "spending money on weapons is like throwing money away."

Mr. Turkatenko said the Reagan administration has rejected the Soviet offer of a missile freeze because of pressure from our (altogether now) "military-industrial complex." And he said that "everyone in the Soviet Union is very much astonished" that Mr. Reagan plans, in Germany, to lay a wreath at a cemetery which includes the graves of some soldiers who were Nazis. He did not say if these same people also were astonished when, prior to World War II, the Soviets signed a non-aggression pact with the Nazis.

In her remarks, Ms. Tingling-Clemmons — who lists among "our leaders" in the "struggle for liberation" and a "proponent of peace" the communist revolutionary Che Guevara — listed the demands and activities of the April 20 "Actions for Jobs, Peace and Justice." She said the political significance of one area where demonstrators will gather,

Meridian Hill Park, has been increased because "the people" have renamed it Malcolm X Park.

She said this April 20 action — which the Communist newspaper Daily World promotes in three news stories and an editorial in its April 11 issue — will feature a giant model of a South African Kruggerrand,

which will unfold into a mural showing something about U.S. support for South Africa; a giant model of an MX missile showing what other things its cost might have purchased; and "a human chain of conscience" at the U.S. Capitol.

We also were promised that a concert will be held by singer Gil Scott-Heron who will sing not just about the bomb, but about shutting down domestic nuclear power plants and about apartheid, joblessness, homelessness, intervention (ours, of course, and not the Soviets, presumably). And a rainbow coalition of city children from daycare centers will sing "We Are the Children."

When Ms. Tingling-Clemmons noted that people at the April 20 action will be asked to fill out questionnaires with questions such as "What are you worried about most, eviction or the Russians are coming?," the man from TASS said (to laughter and applause): "We are already here." Ms. Tingling-Clemmons observed that even if the Soviets did come, they don't really want anything "so radically different from what we, as a people, want."

She said that "all the policies" of the Reagan administration have been "uncivilized from the beginning." And the "only bringer of peace" is negotiations, to talk with the Soviets.

Like the other speakers, Mr. Byrd also was a fount of disinformation. Asserting that there is a "growing militarization" of U.S. society and that there has been a "constant growth" in the American military budget (which there hasn't been when this budget is contrasted with the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations), he said he was worried about "military blocs": NATO, SEATO and the rapid deployment force for the Mideast. He said nothing about the communist Warsaw Pact military forces, much less the massive Red Army.

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On the international scene, Mr. Byrd said U.S. troops "are poised everywhere." Again, he said nothing about the place where more than 100,000 Soviet troops are already deployed, in Afghanistan, where they are slaughtering thousands of innocent men, women and children.

When the floor was opened to questions, the first person to speak was Michael Parenti, an associate fellow at the far-far-Left Institute for Policy Studies whose articles have appeared in "Political Affairs," the theoretical journal of the Communist Party U.S.A.

He attacked "star wars," saying it is being pushed, for profit, by big defense contractors, by those wanting nuclear superiority over the Soviets, and by those wanting a nuclear first-strike capability against the Soviets.

Mr. Parenti also was critical of those in the so-called peace movement who have tried to link human rights in the Soviet Union with arms control and other matters. Noting that Andrei Sahkarov is an admirer of Ronald Reagan, he said that only "right-wing dissidents" are being repressed in the Soviet Union.

At this point, Mr. Turkatenko from TASS agreed enthusiastically. He said that if you try to solve all problems together, "you won't solve one." Ridiculing the idea of linking human rights in his country with other issues, he said: "What if we were worried about the homeless situation in Washington and we wouldn't talk disarmament until these people were housed? And we wanted to verify this and didn't want you to cheat on this? And we wanted to send a commission to see how you do this?" He said he did not think we would allow this.

Mr. Turkatenko returned to the Russians-are-coming-bit, noting that former Secretary of Defense James Forrestal became "a victim of his own paranoia," and leaped to his death in 1947 from a window with the cry: "The Russians have landed."

He said Mr. Forrestal thought that

"Russian tanks were already in the streets of Washington D.C." This greatly amused many in the audience and a man behind me said that current Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger "should do this." There was more laughter and applause.

However, neither account I have read of Mr. Forrestal's tragic death — as described in the "Concise Dictionary of American Biography" or "The New Encyclopedia Britannica" — mentions these alleged quotations.

Then, pointing at me, Mr. Turkatenko said that when some people — "including the newspaper which this gentleman represents" — say that the hand of Moscow is everywhere, "they make this kind of linkage another pretext not to seriously negotiate."

Following this meeting, when I asked Mr. Byrd if he had any qualms about making common cause with communists, he said his concern was for peace "and it doesn't matter what elements support peace."

Me: Communists are for peace? The Soviets want peace?

Mr. Byrd: "Yes, I think so. There's a need for dialogue."

Me: But if they want peace, why do the Soviets have more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan murdering thousands of innocent men, women and children? Do you care about this?

Mr. Byrd: "Yes, I do."

Me: Then why didn't you mention this in your talk?

Mr. Byrd: "I also didn't mention what the U.S. is doing in El Salvador."

Fifty-five U.S. advisers are like 100,000 plus Soviet troops in Afghanistan? A preposterous analogy!

When Mr. Byrd said he thought the Soviets should seek, at the United Nations, a "peaceful settlement" of the Afghanistan "issue," I said: "What the hell are you talking about?! The Soviets are causing this

war! They invaded! A peaceful settlement will occur when they leave!

Mr. Byrd: "That's a matter of question."

He said he "doesn't have the information" to get into this particular issue. But he was opposed to intervention "anywhere."

Me: Have the Soviets intervened in Afghanistan?!

Mr. Byrd: "Well, I don't know ... They say they went in on a peaceful mission."

When I asked Ms. Tingling-Clemmons if she had any qualms about joining hands with communists to talk peace — when the Soviets have troops in Afghanistan slaughtering thousands of innocents — she said she guessed the "best way" to respond to this was "to ask me how I feel about our government sending cattle prods to South Africa?"

Me: Please, answer my question! You and the others have trashed America all night long." She said her understanding was that the Soviets "were invited into Afghanistan by the government of Afghanistan."

Frequently, in this city, politics does make strange bedfellows. But, that night, all the folks together in this bed, under the covers, were as alike as the proverbial peas in a pod.